

MEDIA RELEASE Freedom Day: Advancing meaningful freedom for public servants

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) commemorates Freedom Day as a defining milestone in South Africa's democratic journey.

The Day reflects the hard-won rights and liberties secured in 1994, anchored in dignity, equality, and the freedom of choice. Whilst South Africa has made notable strides in entrenching democratic values, the PSA remains concerned that, for many public servants, the promise of freedom remains constrained by systemic limitations that impact their livelihoods and well-being.

A critical area of concern is the ongoing challenge relating to the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS). Although GEMS was established to provide accessible healthcare benefits to public servants, there are increasing concerns about flexibility, affordability, and, importantly, the right to choose. True freedom must include the ability of public servants to exercise choice over their healthcare. The current environment, where employees are effectively directed towards a single medical scheme, undermines the principle of individual autonomy. Public servants should not be placed in a position where their healthcare options are restricted, particularly when diverse needs and financial circumstances must be considered.

Freedom Day should not only be a symbolic reflection of political liberation. It must translate into practical freedoms that empower people in their daily lives. The PSA therefore calls for a policy review that prioritises choice, inclusivity, and fairness in the provision of medical-aid options for public servants.

The PSA reaffirms the Union's commitment to advocating for improved working conditions, fair labour practices, and the protection of public-sector employees' rights. These remain fundamental to ensuring that freedom is experienced in principle and practice.

As the Country reflects on its democratic progress, the PSA urges all to move beyond rhetoric and actively address the structural challenges that continue to limit the full realisation of freedom for public servants. Freedom must evolve and must be tangible for everyone.

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