

MEDIA RELEASE Prolonged suspensions: PSA alarmed by cost and service-delivery impact

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the persistent and costly practice of prolonged precautionary suspensions across the public service, which continue to weaken service delivery and place an unsustainable burden on the State.

Over the five-year period from the 2021/22- to the 2025/26-financial years, government has spent more than R1 billion cumulatively on salaries and benefits of employees placed on prolonged, paid suspension across national, provincial, and local government. In several instances, public servants have remained on suspension for multiple years, whilst disciplinary processes remain unresolved. This constitutes wasteful expenditure and reflects serious weaknesses in governance and discipline management.

The PSA emphasises that precautionary suspension is intended to be a temporary administrative measure and not a long-term arrangement. When suspensions extend far beyond prescribed timeframes, they signal poor case management, weak accountability, and institutional failure, rather than compliance with fair labour practice.

The impact is far-reaching. Prolonged suspensions inflate the public wage bill without commensurate service delivery, exacerbate staff shortages in critical sectors such as education, health, policing, justice, and municipalities, and increase workloads for remaining employees. Communities ultimately suffer through declining service delivery and loss of trust in public institutions. Employees on extended suspension also face reputational damage, emotional distress, and career stagnation.

Of particular concern is the high number of senior managers suspended for lengthy periods at significant cost, undermining leadership stability and accountability. The PSA calls for urgent action to enforce strict disciplinary timeframes, strengthen internal labour-relations capacity, utilise lawful alternatives to suspension, and hold accounting officers accountable for unjustified delays. Prolonged suspensions benefit no one, not employees, government or citizens.

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