

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	<b>PSA calls for immediate intervention at Tauphuti High School regarding provision of scholar transport</b>
<b>DATE</b>	18 May 2020
<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
<b>ENQUIRIES</b>	communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is concerned regarding the health and safety of learners, as well as educators at Phoshiri Village in Ga-Mphahale. The Department closed Ramalawane High School and relocated the learners to Tauphuti High School in the nearby Majejane Village, which is more than 10 kilometres away from their village. Sadly, the scholar transport was never provided, and learners have been travelling to schools with unsafe transport such as bakkies, by hitchhiking, and even walking through the bush in order to get to school since the beginning of the year. Their call for intervention went to deaf ears of the department. Although the Department of Transport outlawed the use of bakkies to transport learners in 2017, the reality is that for the people of Ga-Mphahale, it is a better option compared to hitchhiking or walking for more than 10 kilometres through unsafe bushes. The learners are caught between a rock and a hard place.

The PSA has previously called on the department to attend to the problem of scholar transport and root out the corruption, which resulted in learners suffering without the provision of transport. It is illogical that the department could close the school and relocate learners to another school, 10 kilometres from their village, without providing transport. Learners are exposed to dangers and risks on a daily basis and it appears that the department is first waiting for an incident to happen before it would attend to the issue of safe scholar transport. The department is oblivious of the plight of these learners and their parents. The outbreak of COVID-19 may seem like a blessing in disguise for Phoshiri Community, as the safety of their children was guaranteed by the lockdown, as they did not have to be exposed to danger on a daily basis to get an education. It is difficult and torturing for parents to worry about the safety of their children. The learners were also constantly late thus affecting their academic performance.

While the Department is still considering options for the reopening of schools, the issue of scholar transport must receive urgent attention for the learners in the rural areas. The PSA is aware that there are many schools that are not provided with scholar transport, despite qualifying in terms of the scholar transport policy. The department is reminded of the statement by the Limpopo Premier in 2018 "Our commitment to provide scholar transport for those learners whose nearest schools are five kilometres or more away from their homes is unwavering". That commitment has not been a reality for parents and learners in the province. The PSA calls upon the MEC of Education to ensure that the learners are not failed on her watch. Her urgent intervention is compulsory or else these children will not have access to an education, which is their right. The PSA still maintains that should everything else fail, other options will be explored like referring the matter to Human Rights Commission. The PSA refuses to keep quiet while the rights of children are trampled over by those that supposed to protect them.

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