

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA condemns Department of Correctional Services decision to prematurely implement full shift system**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 13 000 employees at the Department of Correctional Service (DCS), is appalled by the Department's decision to recall all officials back to work.

More than 6 800 officials and offenders have been infected with COVID-19 to date. History has shown that once a positive case is identified in a Centre, the infection rate increases rapidly amongst officials and offenders. During the COVID-19 lockdown period the DCS and PSA, after much deliberation, reached an agreement to reduce the number of employees per shift to prevent the spread of the virus in Correctional Centres. The agreement further ensured the availability of a second layer of officials should there be a need to simultaneously quarantine several officials.

The National Steering Committee of Correctional Services, which includes labour and the employer, recommended that the 50% shift reduction should remain in force. The PSA is thus extremely concerned that despite this recommendation, DCS Area Commissioners unilaterally revoked this decision and recalled the full staff complement from Monday, 7 September 2020. The PSA regards this action as premature with a real danger of sacrificing the hard-earned gains made over recent months to flatten the infection curve.

It is inevitable that Correctional Centres will experience a second wave of COVID-19 infections. In view the existing staff shortage and with hundreds of infected officials, such a scenario will result in officials being vastly outnumbered by offenders. The PSA therefore calls on the DCS National Commissioner to immediately instruct all Area Commissioners to restore the 50% shift system.

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