

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA urges Gauteng Department of Education to prioritise employees' workplace health and safety issues

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) welcomes the decision by the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) to issue a Contravention Notice to the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) based on the poor condition of the building that houses the Tshwane North District Offices.

The PSA engaged the GDE on numerous occasions urging it to prioritise the health and safety of employees. The GDE's failure to respond has forced the PSA to request the inspection of the buildings, which does not comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* and exposes employees to health hazards.

Employees' health, safety and dignity are not considered by the GDE as they are expected to work in in substandard offices with poor ventilation, inadequate lighting, and dirty carpets, which especially affects employees with respiratory conditions. In addition, the building's roof leaks and offices are smaller than the minimum standard of 2.25 m² of effective open floor area for every employee working in an indoor workplace. It is hard to understand why the GDE insists on employees working under these conditions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which should have served as motivation to prioritise employees' health and safety. The DEL has given the GDE 60 days to repair all defects or face closure.

It is the responsibility of the GDE as employer to ensure that all employees have a safe and healthy working environment and failure to comply with the *OHSA* will not be tolerated by the PSA. The PSA is committed to protect the health and safety of employees and will take necessary steps to ensure that the GDE addresses these concerns and creates safe working spaces. The PSA further urges the MEC of the GDE to conduct an audit of the dilapidated and hazardous buildings to prevent a tragedy. The PSA will not hesitate to litigate should the GDE continue to subject the Union's members to unhealthy and hazardous situations as their rights and interests are of critical importance to the PSA.

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