

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Slow processing of unclaimed bodies in Gauteng mortuaries attributed to state incapacity**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is not surprised to learn that there are about 938 unclaimed bodies in Forensic Pathology Services (FPS) mortuaries in Gauteng, with severe financial implications for already compromised resources of the Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH).

The number is not far from the 1 173 unclaimed bodies that were reported in 2021 when the GDoH undertook to introduce a new, improved electronic system to fast-track the claiming of bodies at its mortuaries. To date, nothing has been done to that effect. The process entails that if a body is not claimed within seven days, fingerprints should be sent to the criminal record centre and the Department of Home Affairs in an effort to assist with identification. The results should then be shared with South African Police Services (SAPS) as the body will be in their possession and they must give approval for a pauper's funeral.

Failure to capacitate the FPS mortuaries by means of staffing and implementation of the improved electronic system is, however, just part of a bigger problem. The Department of Home Affairs and the SAPS are also severely understaffed, which causes delays in undertaking the necessary action for processing unclaimed bodies. The problem is compounded by a large number of undocumented foreigners in the country owing to government's failure to ensure proper border control. Government's inefficiency to deal with various matters compromises the capacity of state institutions to render professional services.

Failure to ensure the capacitation of state institutions will always be at the detriment of citizens and the Department of Health will, unfortunately, continue to experience a high number of unclaimed bodies, which depletes resources. This reality will only change when government is prepared to ensure that public institutions are operating at full capacity. The PSA urges the Departments of Health and Home Affairs to fill vacancies in their establishment and improve the linkage of their IT systems to ensure efficient handing of unclaimed bodies and alleviate pressure on employees.

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