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## **BASIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CONCERNED WITH MISLEADING INFORMATION REGARDING THE INTENTION OF THE BELA BILL**

The Department of Basic Education continues to monitor the progress of the public hearings into the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill.

The National Council of Provinces Committee on Basic Education is conducting public hearings on the BELA Bill.

The Department has, however, noted with disappointment that the Democratic Alliance member of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature Sergio Isa dos Santos has sustained his party's misinformation and disinformation campaign in which they mislead members of the public about the intentions of the BELA BILL.

In a statement issued this morning the DA says the BELA BILL is "regressive and flawed" and that parents in Gauteng have "rejected" it.

This cannot be further from the truth. The imagined "overwhelming rejection" of the BELA is nothing but a desperate attempt at delaying much-needed transformation of the administrative aspects of the basic education sector. In fact the views of the few individuals that attended the public hearings do not represent the majority views expressed around the country. Those few people who objected to some aspects of the Bill dealing with admission and language policies are those who wish to perpetuate the status quo insofar as diversity in schools is concerned.

In truth the BELA Bill, essentially, seeks to strengthen governance in schools by tightening certain sections which have created challenges for the sector. The Department's own monitoring outcomes gave rise to the need to amend parts of the various pieces of legislation to improve administration of the sector.

It is important to note that the BELA BILL is making amendments to certain sections of the South African Schools Act of 1996 to respond to administrative challenges facing our schools and to continue with the transformation agenda of our education system.

It is not a whole-sale Bill that covers all aspects of the basic education sector. Instead it focuses mainly on the administrative processes of the department and schools. It is a Bill that responds to the current needs in terms of the changing demographics of our communities, findings by the courts and our own observations as we monitor schools.

### **Media Enquiries:**

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The Bill has 56 clauses ranging from the introduction of Grade R to learner attendance, Code of Conduct for learners, Home Education, rationalisation of schools, abolishment of corporal punishment and initiations, language policy, admission policy, criminalisation of disruptions not school.

The Bill seeks to have all home education children registered. Every government which is a sovereign state would want to know and account for every child in the country in view of the education of children of school going age. Parents are requested to choose a curriculum of their choice as long as it is internationally recognised and that it is not inferior to the curriculum offered in public schools.

The Department has no intention of taking away the freedom of curriculum choice from the parents.

In addition to this the Bill proposes the intervention of the Head of Department on the development of language and admission policy. This is not about the taking away of powers of School Governing Bodies to determine such policies but to ensure compliance with the country's legislations. The two policies are politically used to derail access to schools of the majority of learners on the basis of language, race, academic performance, ability to pay fees and sporting abilities.

"It cannot be correct that SGBs are given unlimited and unchecked powers and have a finalise say in a school matter which is a public school. No grouping can have absolute power and account to no one in a democratic and sovereign state," said Mr James Ndlebe, Chief Director for Planning and Implementation Support.

The Bill provides for intervention steps that the HOD should take when confronted with language or admission policy that is discriminatory without imposing his authority unlawfully. If these policies remain unchecked, transformation will not be achieved in schools and the mother tongue instruction that we are pursuing will never materials.

"It should be noted that this is not a battle against a particular language grouping. It is a country wide challenge where schools were built along ethnic groups. Now that there is a racial and ethnic mix in all communities, some children are still unable to access schools in their neighbourhoods because they have been designated to serve a particular ethnic group," Mr Ndlebe said.

The Department has full confidence in the NCOP and trusts that the process will result in an outcome that will assist the sector to take the transformation agenda of the country forward.

## ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

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