

Crackdown on bloated government offices

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PRESIDENT CYRIL Ramaphosa's administration is cracking down on bloated offices of cabinet ministers and their deputies, which cost taxpayers millions of rand to maintain.

Public Service and Administration Minister Ayanda Dlodlo has warned her colleagues in the executive not to hire more people than provided by regulations or fill posts with contracts that will go on after elections next year at the end of the term.

"Considering the upcoming elections in mid-2019, departments are cautioned against filling of posts in the offices of the executive authority (ministers) or deputy minister for a period exceeding the period running up to the elections," Dlodlo told national and provincial government departments.

According to the letter dated April 16, Dlodlo warned that incoming ministers and their deputies should not be burdened with an office occupied by permanent incumbents or

staff with contracts which either unreasonably exceed the term of the outgoing office bearer or employ more people than prescribed by the Ministerial Handbook.

Dlodlo said the move would ensure that departments will not experience operational challenges and financial difficulties resulting from an executive authority vacating his or her office after the elections.

She has asked her colleagues to refer cases of employees that are an operational and financial burden to the Public Service Commission.

In the letter, Dlodlo also reminds ministers, their deputies, premiers and MECs that they are allowed to hire officials without following normal advertisement processes but warns that the suitability of candidates must be assessed.

Ministers and premiers are entitled to a private office staff complement of 10 while deputy ministers and MECs can appoint up to six officials including a media liaison officer, a private or appointments secretary, a receptionist and an aide who can double as a driver

or messenger.

An additional post may be provided for ministers whose portfolios relate to the activities of more than one executive institution or portfolio.

Ramaphosa's executive has 35 ministers and 36 deputies.

His predecessor Jacob Zuma appointed a bloated executive after his election in 2009.

The cabinet including Ramaphosa and his deputy David Mabuza costs about R162 million a year in salaries.

The Ministerial Handbook lists the perks for political office bearers in national and provincial departments.

These include luxury vehicles for use in Cape Town and Tshwane and these must not cost more than 70% of a minister and deputy's annual salary between R1.97m and R2.4m.

State VIP accommodation managed by the Public Works Department is also provided in Cape Town and Tshwane.

During his maiden State of the Nation Address in February,

Ramaphosa undertook to initiate a process to review the configuration, number and size of national government departments.

Last Friday, he announced that the process of reviewing the size and shape of the national executive and government departments had begun with a technical task team of officials reviewing the configuration of the national government.

"A review of previous and current configurations is still in progress with the view to establishing the synergy between the constitution and legislation on one hand and the national macro-organisation of the national government on the other. A preliminary analysis has been concluded," Ramaphosa said.

Earlier this year, the SA Institute of Race Relations revealed that the VIP protection budget ballooned from R353m in 2008/09 to R1.5 billion in the current financial year.

The police's VIP protection services provides protection for Ramaphosa, Mabuza, former presidents, their spouses, and other identified VIPs while in transit.