

INFRASTRUCTURE

Where are the SAPS victim-friendly rooms?

THOBEKA NGEMA

THE question about where the victim-friendly rooms in police stations are is a recurring one in Parliament, and yesterday was no different.

A number of members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Police had asked the SAPS about the lack of victim-friendly rooms, for victims of gender-based violence (GBV), in police stations during a meeting yesterday.

According to the police, a victim-friendly room must provide an opportunity for victims of intimate violence, such as GBV and child abuse, to make their statements in private, in a non-threatening environment.

Child safety officer and councillor Mildred Ngcobo, from non-governmental organisation Bobbi Bear, said many years ago they had challenges

in accessing victim-friendly rooms, and some police officers did not know that GBV cases were not opened in the charge office, but in a separate room.

“Long ago, there were none, but there are victim-friendly rooms now,” said Ngcobo.

“The police stations we go to have victim-friendly rooms, and we are working together with the police.”

Ngcobo said while the police stations she goes to for cases have separate rooms for victims, usually they only have a table and chairs. It was up to organisations such as Bobbi Bear to make the rooms friendly and appealing, which helped victims because they often fixated on a particular object when their statement was being taken and the case was being opened. The person taking the statement also has to be friendly.

National police commissioner Gen-

eral Khehla Sitole said a multi-disciplinary collaboration was required for them to provide services, starting from the victim-friendly room. He said the SAPS was not the only sector that played a role.

“There’s Social Development and Public Works, with regard to the victim-friendly facilities, because if it’s a police station that is not evolved, then it means Public Works must assist us there with the construction,” said Sitole.

Deputy national commissioner Lieutenant-General Fannie Masemola said, based on his records, the Western Cape was the only province that did not have a shortage of victim-friendly rooms, unlike the other eight provinces.

Masemola said they would follow up on what happened to the victim-friendly rooms and whether or

not they were turned into offices, as has been claimed by some.

Police Minister Bheki Cele said the issue of victim-friendly rooms needed to be fixed, but the portfolio committee needed to understand that “a big chunk of money” was part of infrastructure, and infrastructure did not only lie with the police.

“We fight with other departments, especially Public Works. It’s a mixture of things that sometimes it looks like it’s police, but it’s across the governance,” said Cele.

“I say management and the ministry must fix what they’re supposed to fix, and next time when these matters are raised, we will tell a better story.”

He said previously there was a problem with rape kits, but they signed a contract in 2019 and the problem was resolved, at least for the next three years.