



Publication: Cape Argus Late - Main
Title: DA slams `secret` changes to perks
Publish date: 13 Oct 2022
Page: 5

Reach: 27662
AVE: R 22784.76
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President Cyril Ramaphosa

HANDBOOK

DA slams 'secret' changes to perks

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THE DA has accused President Cyril Ramaphosa of secretly amending the Ministerial Handbook after it emerged that ministers will no longer be liable to pay for their water and electricity bills at their state residences.

The party said it will be challenging the legality of the Ministerial Handbook, which prescribes the perks members of the national and provincial executives receive, in a complaint to the Public Protector.

This comes after recent reports indicating that government ministers were exempt from paying water and electricity bills due to the fact that South Africa's ministers and deputy ministers do not pay for municipal services such as water and electricity at their official residences after Ramaphosa changed the rules of Cabinet's perks.

This week, *City Press* reported that Ramaphosa had recently revised the handbook, saying the Department of Public Works will now be responsible for paying for the water and electricity at state-owned residences.

According to the DA, this is despite ministers and deputy ministers being among the highest paid civil servants in the country, raking in R2.4 million a year for ministers and R2m a year for their deputies.

This revelation has sparked an outcry on social media and in parts of the country following Eskom's proposed tariff hikes and the recent stage 4 load shedding becoming a common occurrence.

Previously, in the 2019 ministerial handbook, the state would pick up a bill for water and electricity of up to R5 000 at members of the executive's official residences, and if the bill is higher, the member would have to pay for it themselves.

Ramaphosa's April 2022 revision of the handbook has removed this limit, which means the state will now pay the full bill for ministers, deputy ministers, premiers and MECs.

On Monday, after this public outcry, the government in a statement said as stipulated by the Ministerial Handbook, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure was responsible for the costs associated with the provision of water and electricity to any state-owned residence.

The DA's spokesperson on public works, Dr Leon Schreiber, said Ramaphosa has gone a step too far.

"Forcing South Africans to pay the private electricity and water bills for the very same ministers who have robbed citizens of access to these critical services is a slap in the face that the people will not accept."