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Bhisho legislature not fully compliant for the disabled

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The Eastern Cape provincial legislature has failed to comply fully with the law in accommodating people with disabilities.

This comes after a senior employee, Kumara Gazo, asked the department of employment and labour to do an inspection of the legislature building in Bhisho before she could return to work physically.

Gazo has been away from work since 2017, when she was paralysed after allegedly being run over.

She was on sick leave but reportedly began working again remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, and is employed as a senior manager: risk management and compliance.

After several media reports about her continued absence, the legislature asked her to return to work physically, but she has yet to do so.

Now a report by the labour department has found the legislature fell short in terms of its compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

"The designated parking for the provincial legislature is not accessible for people with disabilities," the report stated.

"The current parking arrangement does not comply with Part S of the National Building Regulations and Building Standards.

"The parking spaces do not provide adequate space for persons with disabilities to manoeuvre their wheelchairs and the provincial legislature has indicated that the department of public works will address the issue."

The report said the entrance to the building was also not wheelchair-friendly. It had a narrow ramp with no rails to ease access for people with disabilities, it found.

The bathrooms, "lack necessary facilities such as grab bars, door handles and other requirements stated in the National Building Regulations".

Labour union Nehawu has demanded a meeting with the legislature's management over the findings.

But legislature spokesperson Andile Duka said the legislature did have parking spots for the disabled.

"It is not true that the legislature doesn't have designated parking bays for persons with disabilities.

"Signage is there from the open parking. Signs and notices are there on the way to the chamber.

"Access ramps with railings leading to the chamber are in place and at the entrances from the parking areas.

"Ablution facilities around the chamber for people with disabilities are provided for.

"The lift is next to the chamber for easy access to the public gallery," he said. — *Daily Dispatch*

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