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# Ministerial bills suggest state is a 'milking cow'

**Emsie Ferreira**

Public Works Minister Sihle Zikalala suspects that contractors are treating his department as a "milking cow", his office said on Monday, after a reply to a question in parliament showed grossly inflated charges for maintenance at ministerial residences.

A column appended to Zikalala's reply to a question from the Democratic Alliance (DA) reflected costs ranging from R414 719 for replacing a standby generator to R285 116 for fixing and waterproofing a roof and R19 068 for replacing blown light bulbs at an official ministerial residence in Waterkloof. Also in Waterkloof, R466 107 was spent on repairing and painting cupboards.

The table includes more than 50 entries for servicing fire extinguishers, generally at a cost of about R8 000, and many more for servicing swimming pools. Plumbing costs for clearing blocked drains came to as much as R27 000 a time.

Zikalala, who took over the portfolio from Patricia de Lille in early

wisely but moved swiftly to counter any impression that ministers had sanctioned overspending on their official homes.

On Monday, Zikalala's spokesperson, Lennox Mabaso, said the minister wanted an investigation to be concluded within a month or two.

"He is saying ... that people are taking the department as a milking cow. The minister is saying that, at face value, this has got all the hallmarks of everything that is wrong and malfeasance cannot be ruled out," Mabaso said.

He stressed that whatever went wrong could not be laid at the door of those who occupied these homes, saying a minister simply "inherited" a particular residence and that maintenance was generally scheduled when the occupant was away.

"There is no political office bearer that is responsible for the administration as far as procurement is concerned, the law only prescribes oversight for elected representatives," Mabaso said.

"The entire process is in the hands of the administration; this issue can only be an issue that involves service

March, has said he wants an investigation to get to the bottom of what seems to be “hugely inflated prices”.

“President Cyril Ramaphosa has directed us as ministers to under no circumstances tolerate wasteful or any excessive, unreasonable or potentially corrupt practices,” Zikakala said on Sunday.

He said the administration had a moral duty to use public money

providers and officials.”

Leon Schreiber, the DA’s spokesperson for public works, said he found it strange that any political responsibility for what had transpired had been ruled out before the investigation had begun.

He was filing a complaint to the public protector regarding the expenses, which occurred between 2019 and 2022.