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#### BUDGET SHORTFALL

## Public Works rejects 'untruthful narratives' on prison maintenance

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THE Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) has strongly rejected what it calls "misrepresentations and untruthful narratives" presented to the Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services, following widespread criticism over alleged failure to maintain prison infrastructure, including in KwaZulu-Natal.

During a presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services last week, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) revealed that it paid over R842 million to the DPWI in the 2024/25 financial year for maintenance services, but claimed no work was done, prompting MPs to question whether the DCS had requested a refund.

The MPs also raised concern about the worsening state of correctional facilities, including the closure of the kitchen at Westville Correctional Service Medium A in KZN as it needs refurbishment which will cost R12m.

However, DPWI spokesperson Lennox Mabaso said the department "rejects and takes serious exception to the misrepresentations and untruthful narratives presented before the DCS Portfolio Committee."

Mabaso expressed that the department was "deeply concerned" about the information presented to the committee.

DPWI Director-General Sifiso Mdakane disputed that R842m had been received, stating that financial records showed the amount received from DCS for accommodation charges in 2024/25 was R672m.

"It is unfortunate to learn of this through the media when recently, the ministers of the two departments met and resolved that the accounting officers must lead a task team to resolve all the matters including payments, budget and state of facilities," Mdakane said.

According to the DPWI, the DCS occupies 12 282 properties at a cost of R14.33 per square metre, while the approved finance model sets the cost at R53.60 per square metre — a shortfall of nearly R2 billion annually.

"The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure feels obligated to correct these distortions in the interest of transparency and accountability," Mabaso said.