

Minister asked to establish free SMS line for the deaf

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MBOMBELA: Deaf people in Mpumalanga have asked Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities Lulu Xingwana to establish a free SMS line they can use to report crime.

The call was made during a parliament for people with disabilities held at the provincial legislature in Mbombela under the theme: "Working together to intensify oversight and to foster service delivery".

"We are facing more challenges in our daily lives and even if we want to report abuse or crime against us to the crime line it is impossible because we cannot hear. We urge the minister to [hurry] our request for the establishment of an SMS line so that we can report perpetrators," said Deaf Youth SA's provincial chairman Nkosinathi Ndlovu.

He said blind and deaf citizens were left vulnerable to crime because toll free numbers only assist the able bodied.

"They should have thought of us when establishing the toll free lines because they claim that we have equal rights," he said.

The topics of discussion at the parliament for people with disabilities included the impact of parliament on people with disabilities and equal access to justice for all.

Ndlovu said while they acknowledged the programmes that government has put in place for them, they believed that so much more could be achieved through the participation of people with disabilities at a grassroots level.

"We need to have ward committee members who are disabled so they can understand our challenges and be able to report to relevant offices. Until we have such activists on the ground, nothing will benefit us, we will remain sidelined in tender allocations and still have poor transportation and RDP houses that have no ramps," Ndlovu said.

Another delegate, Thomas Mashiyane, said the best tool to empower people with disabilities was through skills development so that they can become entrepreneurs or start cooperatives.

"We need to have more entrepreneurs who are disabled so that they can empower others. Just because they can't see or hear doesn't mean they can only rely on disability grants," he said.

Mashiyane also strongly condemned those who front people with disability in government tenders.

Another delegate, Sfiso Nkosi, called on government to ensure that driving school owners have K53 in Braille so that those who use sign language can also get driving licences.

"There are those who can afford cars but because it is difficult for them to be trained, they end up having a driver who must be paid when driving them around," said Nkosi.

He also reminded the minister about the call to make sign language an official one.

Responding to the issues raised, Xingwana assured the delegates that their concerns will be addressed.

"This parliament highlighted very important issues; some of the issues are already being attended to. We will be meeting with the Commissioner of Police Riah Phiyega in January to discuss the SMS line and we will have feedback soon," she said.

She said the department was currently working on the transport problems and also making sure that all departments adhere to the call of employing 2% of people with disabilities.

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