



STATE *of the* PROVINCE ADDRESS



FRIDAY, 21 FEB 2025

Time: 10h00

Venue: Lemo Green Park,
Bloemfontein



MaQueen
Letsoha-Mathae,
Premier of the Free State



Building a Province united in progress, let the people govern



FREE STATE PROVINCE



A **FREE STATE** THAT **WORKS FOR ALL**



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Honourable Speaker of the Legislature
Honourable Members of the Legislature and the Executive Council
Honourable Members of the National Assembly and the NCOP
Honourable Judge President and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary
Boetapele ba Ntlo ya Marena le Ma-Khoisan
The Leadership of SALGA and our Municipalities
Acting Director-General and HODs
The Provincial Commissioner of SAPS
The Regional Commissioner of Correctional Services
Leaders of Chapter Nine Institutions
Leaders of the African National Congress and the Alliance
All our Special Guests
Esteemed Members of the media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Honourable Speaker

We have gathered here today as a country and province, mourning the tragic and devastating loss of **14** members of the **South African National Defence Force**, of whom **three** are from the **Free State**, namely:

- **Staff Sergeant Molahlehi Ishmael Molahlehi** from **Unit 1 Extension, Seloshesha** in **Thaba-Nchu**
- **Rifleman Tshidiso Andries Mabele** from **Paul Roux**, and
- **Rifleman Mokete Joseph Mobe** from **C Section** in **Botshabelo**



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These selfless and courageous soldiers were part of a mission to bring peace to the eastern part of the **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Honourable Speaker

It is an honour and privilege for me to stand in this **House** to deliver the **State of the Province Address** to the people of the **Free State**.

We represent their dreams and desires, and carry their hopes and aspirations of a better life for all. Their needs and interests come first.

In my **Opening of the Legislature Address** last year, I committed that during the tenure of the **7th Administration**, it will not be business as usual.

Work to change the landscape of the **Free State** for the better has begun.

This is time to renew, time to build, time to inspire and time to act.

This year marks the **70th** anniversary of the **Freedom Charter**, which was adopted in **1955** in **Kliptown**. This time of political challenge was a great turning point in the struggle against colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy.

People of all races from all walks of life declared their definite desire of a united, free, equal, just, peaceful and prosperous society.

The **Freedom Charter** was inspired by the efforts of women of our country, who in **1954** launched the **Federation of South African**



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Women (FEDSAW) and adopted the **Women's Charter**. This laid the basis for the appreciation of gender equality in the liberation struggle. **Malibongwe!**

Let us commemorate these **70** years of the **Freedom Charter** with great pride and resolve. We should always remember that freedom was not free.

The courage of our people is now being rewarded. We now have a world-acclaimed **Constitution**, with the **Bill of Rights** anchored on the principle of the rule of law, whose basis and source was the **Freedom Charter**.

As stated in the **Freedom Charter** and the recent **January 8 Statement**, the ANC is committed to address the plight and challenges of our people.

The land question, opening the doors of learning, and giving our people dignity remains some of our main priorities. We commend **President Cyril Ramaphosa** for signing three important **Bills** into **Acts**. They are the **Expropriation Bill**, the **Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA Act)** and the **National Health Insurance Bill (NHI Act)**.

All these demonstrate the commitment of the **ANC** in transforming the lives our people.



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The priority actions as outlined by **President Cyril Ramaphosa** during the **113th** anniversary of the **ANC** will inform and shape everything we do.

We will fix local government and ensure water and energy security; speed up inclusive growth to create jobs; strengthen the fight against crime and corruption, and build safer communities; build a **South Africa** that belongs to all through **National Dialogue**; and build a better **Africa** and **World**.

The homecoming and the reburial of the two freedom fighters from the **Free State** will take place after consultations with the affected families.

The mortal remains of **Ishmael Mahlomola Leotle** who was in **Livingstone** in **Zimbabwe**, and **Johannes Sabata Thauthau** who was in **Zambia**, are to be reburied in **Bloemfontein**.

The two freedom fighters belonged to the **Madinoga** and **Luthuli Detachments**, respectively. **Leotle** was the product of the **1976 Generation** that boycotted the apartheid system of **Bantu Education** and later went on to join the ranks of **Umkhonto we Sizwe**.

Thauthau responded to the earliest calls of the leadership of the **ANC** to form part of the first units of **Umkhonto we Sizwe** and left the country to create military camps in anticipation of the growth of the **People's Army**.



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The **Office of the Premier** working with the **Department of Defence and Military Veterans**, will re-establish a unit to address the welfare of military veterans and their families. We will honour our veterans.

Honourable Speaker

On the **08th of May 2024**, **President Cyril Ramaphosa** launched the **30-Year Review Report of South Africa's Democracy**.

The **President** stated that while this **Report** is about **South Africa's** journey since the advent of democracy, it is also a reflection on progress towards the aspirations of the **Freedom Charter** and our **Constitution**.

In the past **30** years, the **Free State** has made great strides in the direction that defined the essence of the fight for freedom and democracy.

When all seemed to be doom and gloom, we gave hope to our people.

But our task is far from over. More still needs to be done. The burden of unemployment, poverty and inequality continues to afflict us.

Our challenges are formidable, but they are not insurmountable.

We have the knowledge, experience and importantly, the willpower to transcend our challenges. Mistakes have been made and lessons learnt.



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With the passage of time, we will overcome our challenges. We will deal with them not with words, but actions. We will step up and act with resolve.

This is our undertaking to the people of the **Free State**, who have entrusted the **ANC** with the responsibility to lead them. We owe it to them.

Our work will be informed, shaped and driven by the following **Medium-Term Development Plan** strategic priorities:

- **Priority 1: Drive inclusive growth and job creation.**
- **Priority 2: Reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.**
- **Priority 3: Build a capable, ethical and developmental state.**

Priority 1: Drive inclusive growth and job creation

Honourable Speaker

This year is about unleashing the economic potential of the **Free State**.

Yes, we need inclusive growth, greater investment, higher income, better living standards, more jobs, less poverty, reduced inequality in turning a new page in our province's economic journey.

And today as we look back, we are proud of the strides we have made. But we are not oblivious to our challenges. More still needs to be done.



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Amid tough economic times, global disruptions, and emerging uncertainties, we are inspired by the current upward economic trajectory.

Unemployment in the province fell from **37,6%** in the **Second Quarter** of **2024** to **36%** in the **Third Quarter** of the same year. The tide is turning.

Latest figures that show an increase in unemployment in the **Free State** to **37,9%** in the **Fourth Quarter** of **2024** are however concerning.

Signs of consistent and sustained economic growth are reassuring.

Driven primarily by lower inflation, falling interest rates, and sustained investment, our economic growth is projected to improve to **1.6%** in **2025**.

Our relentless endeavours to create employment through public employment programmes have been nothing short of rewarding.

For years now, many jobs have been created through **EPWP** with women, youth, and persons with disabilities as the main beneficiaries.

As part of **Phase 5** of **EPWP**, we have committed to create **thirty thousand, one hundred and fifteen (30 115)** employment opportunities.



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I am pleased to report today that in the **2024/25** financial year, which is the first year of **Phase 5** of **EPWP**, we have created **nineteen thousand, seven hundred and ninety-two (19 792)** job opportunities.

In the next financial year, **EPWP** is expected to support poverty alleviation initiatives, promote skills development, and improve service delivery.

Honourable Speaker

Our commitment to **SMMEs** development is unwavering. There is no doubt that these are the basis of our inclusive growth and job creation.

Our partnership with **Coca-Cola Beverages** continues to yield positive results with **fourteen spaza shops** in **Qwaqwa** and **26** in **Mangaung** supported with refurbishments.

Through our partnership with the **National Youth Development Agency**, **32** businesses owned by young people received financial support.

The **Botshabelo Digital Hub** also received financial support to ensure sustained business and digital skills provision to young people. This is deliberate. We want only the best for our youth. They are the future.

The **Basic Coding** skills offered enable entrepreneurs to develop programmes, software applications and websites to enhance efficiency.



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Other forms of support included training **one thousand, one hundred and ninety-six (1 196)** entrepreneurs in bakery, agriculture, construction, business compliance, business skills and vehicle maintenance.

This training was conducted in conjunction with the **Central University of Technology, Small Enterprise Development Agency, Department of Small Business Development** and **MERSETA**.

Alongside these support initiatives, **one hundred and thirty-one (131)** enterprises were assisted with market access opportunities.

The next financial year will be no different. We will drive inclusive growth and job creation to set the province on a daring developmental path.

We will implement more programmes to increase access to finance and opportunities for mainly women, youth, persons with disabilities, and businesses owned by military veterans. We are not apologetic about this.

We will increase the number of competitive small businesses, with a focus on township and rural economies. This will be accompanied by localisation and industrialisation through targeted strategic procurement.



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We will engage the **Free State** business community to explore how they can meaningfully participate in the economic development of the province.

We will transform the future economic landscape of the province by prioritising **Free State** based businesses in the procurement of goods and services to ensure their contribution to the growth of the province.

Honourable Speaker

Progress in enhancing the manufacturing sector beyond its current **10.2%** contribution to our economy is laudable. Our promises are being realized.

We want investors to invest in the future. The future is in the **Free State**.

We are creating enduring partnerships for investment. Because of its compelling investment opportunity offerings, the **Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone (SEZ)** secured lucrative investments in **2024/25**.

These include the **Walk of Life** fruit processing business, with **R330 million** investment value and **173** jobs created. Another similar company, **Clan Leslie Estates**, has invested **R21 million** and created **160** jobs.

There is also a rabbit abattoir owned by **NTTA** Investments valued at **R37 million** employing **66** people. **Rovno Foods** that packages and labels its sauces, has invested **four hundred thousand rands**



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(R400 000) and created **8** jobs in the **Maluti-a-Phofung SEZ**. This is commendable.

Currently, **Maluti-a-Phofung SEZ** has an investment pipeline of **16** investors with about **R3.26 billion** investment value. This investment is expected to create about **one thousand, two hundred and forty-three (1243)** employment opportunities during the **2025/2026** period.

To attract more investment, we are working night and day to upgrade the **Maluti-a-Phofung SEZ**. Improvements include increased power supply, enhanced security, refurbishments of factories, and road maintenance.

Our efforts extend to the refurbishment of factories in the **Phuthaditjhaba Industrial Park**. This work will benefit **30** clothing and textile operators, consisting of **four** cooperatives from the **Phuthaditjhaba** community.

Honourable Speaker

Proposals have been made to reposition all our public entities following their thorough assessment last year. We will soon appoint a new board of the **Free State Development Corporation** to drive investment attraction, enhance corporate governance and improve operations.

Not only will this enhance the efficiency of our public entities, but most importantly, drive economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation.



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Mining is also at the centre of our inclusive growth and job creation drive.

Through various partnerships, we will take mining to the next level by minimising the mining decline and harnessing its growth potential.

Our work with the **Council of Geosciences** that mapped the occurrence of minerals and gas in the province reveals great opportunities.

Prospects of mining surface gold for the next decade are equally pleasing.

Working with the **Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources**, we will remove barriers to entry and support small-scale miners in mining commodities such as sandstone, clay, salt, diamonds, and many others.

The current **6%** contribution of the agricultural sector to the economy is another confirmation of this sector's important role in our economy.

Because of our **Comprehensive Commodity Support Programme**, **47** smallholder producers were capacitated to be commercial producers.

Measures are underway to transform our rural areas to ignite inclusive growth through the revitalization of our **Agri-parks, Farmer Production Support Units, Agri Hubs**, and **Rural-Urban Market Centres**.



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And a lot has been achieved. Already, **Agri-parks** have been established in **Kgolokoeng, Zastron, Ficksburg** and **Kroonstad**. This includes the creation of **Farmer Production Support Units** within the **Agri-parks**.

We have supported **35** agri- businesses with agro-processing initiatives.

Climate change is here. And these are no ordinary times. Inclusive growth and job creation will not be possible without climate change adaptation.

Never before have we seen raging veld fires, rising temperatures, extreme droughts, severe floods and damage to the ecosystem like we do today.

We will not wait and watch as our planet burns. We need to rethink how we live, what we do, how we do it, and lead the charge for change.

In response, we are implementing the **Free State Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**, building structures, collaborating with research institutions, and implementing projects to build resilient communities.

Success will only come if we change our ways in this changing world.

Some of the initiatives we are implementing include: water harvesting in **Wepener**, removal of alien and invasive species in **Rustfontein**, cleaning of waterways in **Bloemfontein** and **Harrismith**, planting trees



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in public facilities throughout the province, and capacity building of municipalities.

Honourable Speaker

Efficient road infrastructure is important for development. Highways, railways and access roads connect people, cities, towns and rural areas as well as enhancing prospects of economic opportunities.

As a result, **R1.9 billion** was invested in the construction, upgrading and maintenance of our road infrastructure. We are inspiring confidence to bolster growth and development. And time will be the judge of our work.

We are pleased to announce that we will complete the following roads:

- **Zastron – Sterkspruit**
- **Rosendal – Ficksburg**
- **Jacobsdal – Koffiefontein**
- **Koffiefontein – Luckhoff – Havenga Bridge**
- **Harrismith SEZ, and**
- **Viljoenskroon – Orkney**

We have made available **R993 million** for special road maintenance to address rapid road deterioration caused by increased freight transport.

As we have committed last year, our partnership with **SANRAL** is growing stronger. This has created massive employment and economic opportunities in the province. It is expected that these opportunities will continue to grow into the foreseeable future.



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We are pleased with the upgrade of **N1** from **Zandkraal** to **Scotland**. This project will create jobs and sub-contracting opportunities.

The **Thaba-Nchu** to **Tweespruit** road is also expected to create jobs and of subcontracting opportunities.

The **634 km** of road network we transferred to **SANRAL** has created **one thousand, five-hundred and seventy (1 570)** jobs.

Through our **Welisizwe Rural Bridge Programme**, we have completed the construction of **four** bridges in partnership with the **South African National Defence Force**. These are the bridges of opportunities.

We will soon commence engagements with the national **Department of Public Works** to find alternative ways to accelerate the implementation of the **Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme**.

An amount of **R210 million** has been allocated for this **Welisizwe Programme** in the next financial year.

This is the change we want to see, and the change we are delivering.

Currently, construction, repairs and maintenance of the following roads with a combined budget of **R758 million** are ongoing:

- **Henneman – Kroonstad – Virginia**
- **Senekal – Lindley**



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- **Lindley – Petrus Steyn**
- **Tweespruit – Excelsior**
- **Senekal – Rosendal**
- **Koppies – Sasolburg**
- **Kroonstad – Steynsrus**
- **Sasolburg – Heilbron (Phase 2)**
- **Tweespruit – Hobhouse, and**
- **Qwaqwa Primary Roads**

We have set aside **R250 million** for the following new projects to commence in the first quarter of the **2025/26** financial year:

- **Clocolan – Marquard**
- **Ladybrand – Hobhouse**
- **Dealesville – Hertzogville – Christiana border**
- **Oppermansgronde (gravel to surface upgrade)**
- **Thaba Nchu S1523**
- **Thaba Nchu S1531, and**
- **Reitz – Kestell**

Honourable Speaker

Work is underway to roll-out major infrastructure projects with strategic partners that include **Infrastructure South Africa** and the **Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)**.

The signing of the land availability agreement with **Metsimaholo Local Municipality** leasing **one thousand and four (1 004)** hectares of land



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for the establishment of the **Vaal SEZ** as part of the **Vaal River City Region** initiative between the **Free State** and **Gauteng** is exciting.

We will make funds available for the **Vaal SEZ** feasibility study and business case. We will also expedite the appointment of a **Transactional Advisor** and a dedicated team to drive the **Free State** side of the project.

The **Gauteng-Free State-KZN** corridor is a key freight passage for the country. Engagements with Gauteng have started to develop this corridor.

For the **Free State**, the **Maluti-a-Phofung SEZ**, **Harrismith Gateway** and **Tshiame Industrial area** will be considered as central points for logistics.

Another important project under consideration is the **Gauteng, Free State** and **Eastern Cape** manufacturing and automotive rail project.

We will position the **Free State** as the central freight and logistic hub.

The **Mangaung Airport Development Node** is under consideration for advanced project preparation by **Infrastructure South Africa**.

Project preparation for the replacement of asbestos and galvanised steel water pipes in **Matjhabeng Local Municipality** is similarly in progress.



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Metsimaholo Local Municipality has been selected as one of the only **five** municipalities nationally to receive key infrastructure support under **Infrastructure South Africa's Adopt-a-Municipality Programme**.

Our energy transformation drive to position the **Free State** as the country's central energy hub is in motion and progress made is notable.

The DTIC shows that the **Free State** renewable energy investment pipeline is set to produce an impressive **six thousand, five hundred and sixty-seven (6 567)** megawatts of power. This diverse energy mix that includes solar, wind and battery is expected to come online in **2026**.

We have identified **29** dilapidated and unused properties to be repurposed through models such as **Build-Operate-Transfer, Long and Short-term Leases, Refurbish-Operate-Transfer** and **Outright Sale** as we have committed in the **Opening of the Legislature Address** last year.

Interested businesses will be invited in the **2025/2026** financial year through competitive bidding to submit proposals as part of this process.

I will soon announce members of the **Premier's Economic Advisory Council**. The **Council** will serve as an advisory body to help bring about the desired inclusive growth and development in the province.



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The **Council** will consist of individuals with exceptional skills to contribute towards attracting the much-needed investment to our province.

Priority 2: Reduce poverty, and tackle the high cost of living

Honourable Speaker

It is our moral obligation to fight poverty. Poverty breeds hopelessness, despair, desperation, and indignity. This, we will not allow.

Poverty should not have a name, place or a face in the **Free State**.

We need to improve livelihoods and create opportunities for human development to thrive. This will require more resources and more action.

Benefits of our social wage interventions are many. It is a means to economic inclusion, poverty alleviation and human development.

Importantly, social wage instils a sense of self-worth and responsibility.

And with **one million and one hundred thousand (1 100 000)** people in the **Free State** receiving various forms of social grants, we are determined to lift people out of poverty and unleash their human potential to thrive.



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Looking back in the past financial year, we are proud that **329** people in **Mangaung**, **966** in **Lejweleputswa**, **645** in **Fezile Dabi**, **494** in **Xhariep**, and **806** in **Thabo Mofutsanyana** have benefitted from our programmes of subsistence farmers and vulnerable households' food security.

As part of our commitment to ensure access to food to the poor and vulnerable, we continue to provide nutritious meals and developmental programmes to **49 Community Nutrition and Development Centres**.

Honourable Speaker

The scourge of **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide** is alarming. Lives continue to be lost, families destroyed and individuals damaged.

Enough is enough. This must stop. We need to change attitudes.

More resources will be directed to **Thuthuzela Care Centres, Safe Houses, Shelters** and **Victim Friendly Centres** to fight this scourge.

Interventions to ensure the effectiveness of **Centres** include installation of a solar system in **Sasolburg, Welkom and Wepener Shelters**.

Toys have been procured for the play area at the **GBVF Centre** in **Koffiefontein**, and an electric fence and **CCTV** cameras have been installed at the **Tshepo Ya Rona Shelter** in **Bethlehem**.

Substance abuse perpetuates violence, poverty and despair. The costs are way too much to contemplate. Things cannot go on like this.



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To address these challenges, we completed the renovations at **Kopano Multi-Drug Resistance Centre** in **Welkom**. **Thirty-three NPOs** were funded to provide substance abuse prevention programmes and **forty-one thousand and sixty-five (41 065)** people were reached.

Seven hundred and eighty-nine (789) service users accessed treatment for substance use disorder services, and **278** accessed aftercare services.

We will verify all liquor licenses in the province and develop mechanisms to curb the mushrooming of liquor outlets in our communities.

We note the positive progress made in reducing crime levels in the **Free State**. The **Second Quarter** crime statistics for the **2024/25** period shows that **11** out of the **17** community-reported crimes have shown a decline.

Decreasing incidents of crimes such as murder, common assault, aggravated robbery, and car hijacking are reassuring.

While we welcome the reduction in these crimes, we are aware that much still needs to be done to rid our province of crime. We cannot rest.

How can we rest, when **Nozenza Mtsi** from **Bultfontein**, who was **87** years old, was savagely stabbed **11** times by an assailant?



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We were saddened by the barbaric murders of **one** year-old **Oanetse Nkatlo** and her mother **Puleng Nkatlo** in **Petrus Steyn**.

We will not be silent when children such as **Ogone Mpuru**, who was **5** years old, was stabbed to death allegedly by his mother's **64-year-old** partner.

The brutal murder of **Thato Ratlalane**, a **Community Development Worker** from **Manyatseng**, whose lifeless body was discovered by her daughter, demands of us to intensify our efforts to put an end to **GBVF**.

We will continue to demand harsh punishment for perpetrators of violence against women and children. Keeping the people safe is our priority.

We commend members of the **South African Police Service** who are at the forefront of the efforts to fight crime and keep us safe from harm.

We are proud of officers such as **Sergeant Bokamoso Peter**, whose great work has secured convictions exceeding **300** years of prison time.

She won the **Ministerial** award at the **South African Police Service Excellence Awards** in **January** this year. We thank **Sergeant Peter** and other police officers for putting criminals off the streets and in jail.

Our crime prevention efforts will continue. We will invest in crime intelligence, use of technology, provide more resources, strengthen multi-sectoral collaborations and enhance rapid response capabilities.



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Honourable Speaker

Provision of quality education remains one of our top priorities. Education eliminates poverty, unlocks potential and improves the quality of life.

Everywhere, education is a pathway to inclusive growth and development.

Our education achievements remain exceptional. We have yet again, through the **Grade 12 Class of 2024** maintained our **Number One** spot as the best-performing province in the country since **2019**.

Not only did we maintain the **Number One** spot, but we have recorded an improvement from **89%** pass rate by the **Grade 12** class of **2023** to **91%** pass rate by the **Grade 12** class of **2024**. We are unstoppable.

No other province has achieved this feat. This is evidence of our commitment to be **Simply Excellent!**

More pleasing is that, **4** of our districts were in the top **10** in the country, with **Fezile Dabi District** holding the second position nationally.

All of this would have not been possible without the support, dedication and hard work by learners, educators, parents, SGBs and unions.

Words alone cannot express how grateful we are. **Re ya leboha!**



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These commendable education results are the outcome of our investment in improving access to the quality and early childhood learning.

For the **2025/26** financial year, we have budgeted **three hundred and thirty-five million, eight hundred and twenty-one rands (R335 821 million)** to ensure access to quality **Early Learning Programmes** for **seventy-five thousand, seven hundred and five (75 705)** children.

The allocation will go a long way in providing nutritious food to children, and contribute towards the payment of stipends of **ECD** practitioners, as well as improving the conditions of **ECD** centres.

Fifty-eight ECD centres across the province have been renovated and maintained. Construction of a new low-cost **ECD** centre in **Botshabelo** is currently underway and the **Centre** will be opened soon.

Nowhere is our commitment to provide quality education even more evident in our significant investment in education infrastructure.

The following schools are under construction across the province and are anticipated to be completed:

- **Matlafalang Primary School** in **Motheo**
- **Bergman Primary School** in **Motheo**
- **Trompsburg Special School** in **Xhariep**
- **Malebogo Primary School** in **Lejweleputswa**
- **Morena Tshohisi Primary School** in **Thabo Mofutsanyana**



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- **Father Balink Primary School** in **Fezile Dabi**, and
- **Tsebo Ulwazi Secondary School** in **Fezile Dabi**

The following schools: **Dr Blok**, **Olympia** and **Western Holdings**, are under construction to replace inappropriate material.

Seven new schools are under planning for construction commencement in the new financial year. They are:

- **Welkom Primary School** in **Lejweleputswa**
- **Ouma Tsopo Primary School** in **Lejweleputswa**
- **Kgatelopele Senior Secondary** in **Lejweleputswa**
- **Langenhovenpark Combined School** in **Mangaung**
- **Kgotso Taole Technical School** in **Mangaung**
- **Vogelfontein Primary School** in **Thabo Mofutsanyana**, and
- **Intuthuku-Kathelo Senior Secondary** in **Thabo Mofutsanyana**

A hostel at **Boitumelong Special School** and another at **Dr. Blok School** in **Mangaung** are under construction. The construction of the **Trompsburg Special School** hostel in **Xhariep** will commence soon.

Honourable Speaker

No inclusive growth will be realised without quality healthcare. And we are edging closer to the goal of universal access to healthcare.

Less professionals mean less provision of services. This we cannot afford.



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That is the reason why, last year, we employed **one thousand, two hundred and thirty-two (1 232)** healthcare professionals that include **Doctors** and **Nurses**. More will be employed in the next financial year.

The **one thousand, one hundred and twelve (1 112)** contract workers employed to ease the **COVID-19** health pressures, whose contracts expired in **October 2024**, were re-employed in **January** this year.

Their return is a crucial step in increasing the provision of health services.

We have procured more **Renal Dialysis Machines** and installed **Renal Water Purification Systems** in some of our hospitals.

At **Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli Regional Hospital** in **Qwaqwa**, **six** dialysis machines were commissioned in this financial year. A **Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit** was delivered, and will be installed and commissioned upon the completion of construction and prefiltration.

At **Boitumelo Regional Hospital**, **ten** dialysis machines, **two** mobile **Reverse Osmosis**, and a **Reverse Osmosis Plant** are in clinical use.

Importantly, availability of medicines in our health facilities is above **90%**.



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Many of our strategic partners have indicated that funding from **USAID** has been stopped. This poses an immediate threat of job losses to about **725 Healthcare Workers, Social Workers, Data Capturers, Cleaners** and many others. We will find innovative ways working with national **Department of Health** to mitigate the impact of this decision.

Due to increasing population, urbanisation and changing lifestyles, our health burden is increasing, putting pressure on our available facilities.

The following healthcare facilities that are under construction will be completed in the **2025/26** financial year:

- **Thandanani Clinic** in **Welkom**
- **Rheederpark Clinic** in **Welkom**
- **Borwa Clinic** in **Tweespruit**
- **Clocolan Clinic** in **Clocolan**
- **Dinaane Clinic** in **Thaba-Nchu**, and
- **Valrok Clinic** in **Brandfort**

We are also upgrading hospitals, laboratories, neonatal facilities, renal units, maternity wards, pharmacies, mortuaries, theatres and heli-stops.

We have taken note of particular challenges at the **Bloemfontein Government Mortuary** and plans are afoot to remedy the situation.

As I committed in the **Opening of the Legislature Address** last year, I am pleased to announce that the following health facilities now render a **24-hour** service:



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- **MUCPP in Mangaung (Maternity and Emergency Services)**
- **Heidedal Clinic in Mangaung (Emergency Services)**
- **PAX Clinic in Viljoenskroon (Emergency Services)**
- **Bolata Clinic in Qwaqwa (Maternity Services)**
- **Lesedi Clinic in Kroonstad will be operational from April 2025 (Maternity and Emergency Services)**

After the expiration of the **Netcare** contract at **Pelonomi Hospital**, we will utilise the building as a maternity ward to ease the pressure from **Pelonomi**, by **November** this year.

Honourable Speaker

We commit that there shall be housing, security and comfort for all.

We are driving integration to bring people closer to areas of opportunities.

We will complete the upgrade of **G-Hostel in Welkom**, and **Dark and Silver City Development in Bloemfontein** in the **3rd Quarter of the 2025/26 financial year**. Conversion and development of hostels into family units is our way of saying our people deserve better.

We will also upgrade **34** informal settlements by the end of cycle to ensure access to basic services and security for thousands of residents.



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This financial year, we planned to service **three thousand, six hundred and fifty-two (3 652)** sites on informal settlements and green-fields.

We have surpassed this target and serviced **six thousand, eight hundred and seventy-eight (6 878)** sites.

We will this year invite contractors through a competitive bidding process to complete historically incomplete houses throughout the province.

In improving the living conditions of our people in rural areas, we will eradicate mud houses and replace them with proper housing structures in **Thabo Mofutsanyana District** and **Mangaung Metro**.

We also commit to delivering government-subsidized housing across various types to meet the diverse needs of our communities.

We understand that a house is about investment, raising families and human dignity. This is our human settlement approach. And even today, it is our undertaking to hand over **Title Deeds** to the rightful beneficiaries.

Let me take this opportunity to apologise to the people of **Thaba Nchu** and all our people in the province for the misallocation of **Title Deeds**.



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The **Title Deeds** that we will hand-over to the people of **Thaba Nchu** before the end of this year, is our way of saying that we know you deserve better. We dare not fail you.

I have requested **the Department of Human Settlements** to verify and allocate unoccupied houses to qualifying beneficiaries from the existing list by the end of **April 2025**.

Honourable Speaker

Through, sports, arts and culture, we continue to build the capacity to unite, value, inspire and celebrate our differences. Our commitment to social cohesion fills us with optimism of far greater unity in diversity.

Beyond its social cohesion aspect, sport is an important economic vehicle.

Our capacity to host major sporting events was proven by the **Bafana Bafana** versus **Zimbabwe**, and the **Springboks** versus **Portugal**, as well as the **Knockout Cup Final** between **Magesi FC** versus **Mamelodi Sundowns** events held last year.

We will be hosting the **COSAFA** games in **June 2025**, further demonstrating that **Free State** is the home of major sporting events. This initiative will not only have an impact on long-term football development, but it will also leave a lasting legacy within the Free State



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football ecosystem renowned for its soccer loving fans of **Siwelele Sa Masele**.

This will be an opportunity to showcase our endless tourism potential, and deliver significant socio-economic opportunities to the people of **Free State**.

We are in consultations with the **Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Mr Gayton McKenzie** to return **Bloemfontein Celtic** to the top flight football and back to the **Free State**.

The decision by **Marumo Gallants** to make **Mangaung** their home ground has also reignited the vibrant sporting spirit in our province.

Other sports and recreation initiatives include the hosting of national **Indigenous Games**, the **O.R Tambo Games** and **Sport Awards**.

This year, in collaboration with the private sector, we will host **MACUFE!** We will use this festival to celebrate our talent and ignite economic growth.

Priority 3: Building a capable, ethical and developmental state

Honourable Speaker

The existence of a capable, ethical and developmental state is all too important for us to build an effective, transparent and caring public service.



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This is about responding to our development challenges, just as much as it is about connecting societal efforts to drive our transformation agenda.

We need to be professional, ethical and responsive to people's needs.

Success in this regard will also require that government be functional, responsive, and applies strict adherence to fiscal consolidation.

To find a balance between these competing needs, we will ensure that only critical positions in government are filled, as part of our efforts to professionalise and regularise appointments in the public service.

Out of the **112** contract workers in the **Office of the Premier** whose contracts expired, **88** of those have been re-employed. Importantly, **42** of those contract workers have now been permanently appointed.

The pressure on our fiscus is real. We have to do more with less.

As previously committed, all **HODs** have subjected themselves to security vetting and the **State Security Agency** is now completing the process.

We are now implementing fiscal sustainability measures as part of our long-term interventions to fill vacant positions to build a capable state.

In ensuring ethical conduct as part of our responsibility to **Build a Capable, Ethical and Developmental State**, we are fighting corruption and driving accountability. This is about our integrity, trust and values.



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Annually, we submit our financial disclosure forms to prevent conflict of interests. Lifestyle audits are also compulsory for public servants.

Unlawful instructions hamper service delivery and breed corruption. We urge public servants to comply with the **Public Service Commission Circular No. 5 of 2024**, which emphasises compliance with the law.

More importantly, the **Circular** reiterates compliance with the provisions of the **Constitution** and the **Public Finance Management Act**.

I am proud to announce **Professor Brian Nakedi** as the new **Public Service Commissioner** of the province.

We have taken a decision to put a **R650 000** expenditure cap on state funerals.

Honourable Speaker

We are deeply concerned about the state of some of our municipalities.

Their failure to provide services such as water, electricity and refuse removal is worrying. Water treatment plants are not maintained. Electricity infrastructure is collapsing. Taps are dry. Streets are littered with garbage.

Work to improve the state of our municipalities is continuing. We want to get the basics right and improve service delivery to our people.



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Professionalisation of local government is ongoing. We continue to assist municipalities with the implementation of the **Municipal Staff Regulations** meant to create a development-oriented local government.

We are also supporting municipalities with the development of municipal staff establishments that are fit for purpose, review of competency assessments, and remuneration framework for senior managers.

Section 56 Managers are now permanently appointed in compliance with the **Municipal Systems Amendment Act of 2022**.

Deployment of competent managers and technical officials to municipalities to enhance service delivery is also continuing.

We have committed to improve the work of **Community Development Workers (CDWs)** to better serve our communities. Discussions are underway with municipalities to establish reporting mechanisms for **CDWs** with the intention that they report to their respective municipalities. The interaction has started with **Fezile Dabi District Municipality**.

Mafube, Tokologo, Kopanong and **Matjhabeng** local municipalities, including **Mangaung Metro** are under **Section 139** of the **Constitution**.

So far, progress to restore their service delivery capability is notable.



In **Matjhabeng Local Municipality**, we have appointed a representative team in **February** this year to manage the implementation of the **Financial Recovery Plan**. The team is expected to present monthly progress reports to the **Municipal Council** and the **Executive Council**.

Four days ago, we met with the **Electricity Minister, Dr. Kgosientsho Ramokgopa** and all the municipalities in the province to ensure that municipalities are able to meet their obligations to **ESKOM**.

Ten municipalities in our province are participating in the **Eskom Debt Relief Programme** meant to help them settle their current accounts.

We continue to provide support to these municipalities to ensure compliance and financial discipline in their engagements with **Eskom**.

Since the implementation of the **Distribution Agency Agreement (DAA)** between **Maluti-a-Phofung** and **Eskom**, a lot of work has been done.

High level network infrastructure has been refurbished and plans are underway to achieve a reliable network infrastructure in **Qwaqwa**.

The conventional customer metering assessment has been audited and completed in **Kestell, Harrismith** and the **MAP SEZ**.



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A total of **418** commercial meters have been installed since **01 November 2024** and **two thousand, four hundred and seventy-five (2 475)** prepaid meters will be converted into the smart meter technology.

The process of repairing damaged meter kiosks for revenue collection, and technical assessments for the electrical network has started.

We commit to meet our electricity, water, services and property rates obligations to municipalities to lessen their dire financial state. Payment plans will be developed and adhered to. We will lead by example.

The **Department of Water and Sanitation** has allocated **R1.4 billion** to deal with water and sanitation issues in the province. This amount is meant to improve water supply and quality, and upgrade **Water and Wastewater Treatment Works** throughout the province.

Honourable Speaker

We strive for accountability and sustainability in the management of public finance. How we use and account for every cent matters.

The **2023/24** financial year audit outcomes of provincial departments show some improvements. Of the **thirteen** departments that include the



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Legislature, seven received qualified audit opinion and another **eight** unqualified opinion. **Three** departments received a clean audit.

We commend these improvements, and commit to do more and better.

Seven municipalities received unqualified audit opinion and **nine** were qualified. **One** municipality received a disclaimer in **2023/24** financial year compared to **five** in the previous financial year.

The **Provincial Treasury** continues to provide support to departments and municipalities in improving their fiscal governance.

District Audit Action Plan Forums have been established to monitor the implementation of audit recommendations and timely submission of **Annual Financial Statements**.

We will establish a **Provincial Audit Steering Committee** comprising of **Provincial Treasury, COGTA, SALGA and Auditor General South Africa** to deal with matters hampering improved audit outcomes.

We are also implementing the **Unauthorised, Irregular, Fruitless, and Wasteful Expenditure Reduction and Preventative Strategy**.

We will provide support and training to municipal **Supply Chain Management, Internal Audit and Risk Management** units.

Honourable Speaker



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While we have noted with concern the high rate of food contamination reports in the country, in the **Free State** we have increased our efforts to ensure compliance of businesses and **spaza shops**.

On the **15th of November 2024**, **Circular No. 34 of 2024** was issued compelling municipalities to register businesses. **COGTA**, together with **DESTEA** and **SALGA** are monitoring progress on the registration of businesses, including **spaza shops** in our townships in all municipalities.

Work is underway to establish functional **Disaster Management Centres** in every district to enhance our response during emergencies.

A **Provincial Disaster Management Centre** will be opened in **Mangaung** to serve as a hub for disaster response coordination across the province.

Implementation of the **District Development Model** is now a requirement. We will oversee the effective implementation of this **Model**, including policy alignment and integration across the three spheres.

District Development Model political champions have been appointed, and **Districts** including **Mangaung Metro** have submitted their 2nd generation **One Plans** to direct investment spending and service delivery.



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We value the institution of traditional leadership, as an important part of our democracy, and a bridge between our past, present and the future.

We have approved the establishment of **Traditional Councils** in terms of **Section 16(1)** of the **Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act**.

Names of **12 Traditional Councils'** members have been announced.

We have procured vehicles for our **Traditional and Khoisan Leaders** and will complete renovations of their offices in **Bloemfontein** in **April**. We will also procure offices for them in **Qwaqwa** and **Vrede** in the near future.

Honourable Speaker

Skilled workforce is our hope in building a capable and developmental state. We want thinkers, experts and achievers to take us into the future.

That is the reason why we continue to provide training and development to improve service delivery performance.

Working with the **National School of Government**, the **Free State Training and Development Institute** presented training courses to senior managers. They include, but are not limited to: **Ethics in the Public Service; Supply Chain Management and Financial Management Delegations of Authority**.



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We are proud of the fact that the **Institute's NQF Level 3 to NQF Level 6** qualifications are accredited. We are now leading the process to implement **NQF level 7** qualification, which is equivalent to a degree.

Investment in training and skills development is also evident in our **Bursary Programme** meant to help the youth to reach their dreams, and contribute to the growth and development of the **Free State**.

The 7th administration has taken a decision to publicize the process to apply and adjudicate bursaries awarded by the provincial government, to ensure transparency, and that only deserving students receive the bursaries.

The **International Students Programme** has ended, and we await the **SIU** report on the investigation on this **Programme**.

We have partnered with all **SETAs** to provide various skills development programmes such as **Internships, Learnerships, Apprenticeships, Work Integrated Learning, and Artisan Development** opportunities.

As we prepare for local government elections next year, we will reaffirm the role of community media as crucial in taking government to the people.

This will include capacitating communicators at local government level.



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We continue to strengthen our relations and cooperation with like-minded provinces in other countries in support of our development priorities.

We continue to strengthen our collaboration with the **People's Republic of China** focusing on expanding economic opportunities. Our partnership with **People's Republic of China** has resulted in donation of **11** electricity generators, which will be distributed to schools, healthcare facilities and government buildings facing power shortages. We appreciate this move.

We also held engagements with the **Consulate General of the Republic of India** on matters of mutual interest. We appreciate the full-bursary and capacity-building opportunities offered by the **Republic of India**.

Our cooperation with these and many other countries will continue.

We are benefiting from opportunities offered by the African **Continental Free Trade Agreement** with a market of more than **one billion** people.

Ten enterprises were assisted to be part of this **Agreement**.

It is with great pride that we welcome **South Africa's Presidency** of the **G20**. We will have a distinct honour of hosting the **G20 Summit** this year.



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This is not just a momentous occasion for **South Africa**, but the entire continent, as it marks the first time **Africa** will host the **G20**, held under the theme: **Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainable Development**.

The **Free State** is ready to capitalise on the opportunities created by our **Presidency of the G20**. We look forward to hosting the bio-economy session at the **University of the Free State** this month.

Conclusion

Honourable Speaker

As we reflect on our past and look into the future, ours is a transformation journey filled with achievements, determination and courage to succeed.

So many successes, so many developments and so many achievements. But our challenges are a reminder that more still needs to be done.

We should turn our challenges into opportunities. They should reignite the passion to serve with sincerity, honour, humility and determination.

Expectations are high, and the road ahead is filled with peaks and valleys.

We need to dream and dream big. Dreams have the power to change the world. As the father of our nation **Nelson Mandela** once reminded us,



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“A winner is a dreamer who never gives up.”

Let me extend my gratitude to all of you Honourable Members in this **House** for your wisdom and keeping our democracy alive.

I call on all of you to work with us to turn our people’s dream into lived realities. We all share the dream of an inclusive and prosperous **Free State**. Let us all rise to this challenge no matter our differences.

Allow me to thank the Acting Director General and his team, and all officials responsible for spearheading the State of the Province Address process.

Not forgetting my beloved organisation, the **African National Congress** for affording me the opportunity to steer the ship of this **7th administration** as the Premier. I am deeply humbled, and pledge to execute my responsibilities with great humility.

Most importantly, my deepest thanks to my family for their patience, understanding and loving support.

Let us build a province united in progress. Let the people govern!

I thank you
