

NHI Public Hearings ‘Don’t say that the government doesn’t do anything for you’

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Much like at the hearings before this one, residents demand the current public healthcare facilities to be fixed first.

On Wednesday evening, Harry Gwala Multi-Purpose Centre Sasolburg was filled up with hundreds of Free State residents who stood before Parliament’s portfolio committee of health to submit their thoughts on the National Health Insurance (NHI) draft bill.

As a standard procedure of these gatherings, a representative from the mayor’s office welcomes members of Parliament. The representative then tells citizens that the NHI is here for the poor.

“Don’t say that the government doesn’t do anything for you,” she remarked.

Although many expressed their support for the proposed legislation, they brought up problems that they think should be fixed before the bill can be passed.

Thandiwe Makgwa Sebogodi, who is an employee of the department of health believes that the NHI bill looks good on paper.

“I would have loved to say that I support this bill because it looks good on paper, however, the current state of public healthcare is not in a good state. As a public servant, I think that we should start by fixing our current challenges and thereafter we can implement the NHI.”

She added that many nurses are unemployed and those who are working are being paid less than what they are qualified for.

Siphiwe Mokwena is the Chairperson of Civil Society of the Free State.

“We are the users of the public health facilities. We are the ones who feel the pain. We plead with the portfolio committee not to play politics with people’s healthcare. It is clear that the NHI is going to strengthen the public healthcare system. We, therefore, ask for the implementation of the NHI to be accelerated,” he submitted.

While some expressed their support for the draft law, they also asked that it should be protected from fraudulent conduct.

Dumisani Radebe said that the vision of the NHI bill gives him hope but asked if the government has done enough research to ensure that the NHI is sustainable.

He asked the committee: “I want to ask those in charge of the NHI if they have done their homework. If the finances are available? Are there qualified doctors available? Are there systems in place to protect it from corruption?”

Roy Jenkinson criticised the portfolio committee for only holding two hearings in the Free State. Initially, Parliament planned to have three public hearings in the province but cancelled

the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality meeting because of the recent service delivery protests.

Jenkinson also said that the hearings were poorly advertised as he heard about them through “political structures”.

Joseph Mqubane asked that the bill ensure that people living with disabilities also receive quality healthcare as he believes that they often receive discrimination in healthcare facilities. He said it took him five years to get a wheelchair.

Mqubane also asked that all clinics should operate on a 24-hour basis.

“This will not only help with people’s increased access to healthcare but also help people get jobs.” – Health-e News