

# STATE *of the* PROVINCE — ADDRESS —

20 FEBRUARY 2026

VENUE: OLD GREYS SPORTS  
GROUND, BLOEMFONTEIN

Hon. MaQueen  
Letsoha-Mathae  
Premier of the Free State

“The Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local  
Government and Transform the Economy”

#FSSOPA26 #FixingMunicipalities  
#GrowingtheEconomy



FREE STATE PROVINCE



A **FREE STATE** THAT **PDF Scanner** **DRIVES** **Scanner** **ALL**

**"The Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy"**

**Speaker of the Free State Legislature, the Honourable Mxolisi Dukwana**

**Honourable Members of the Legislature**

**Honourable Members of 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**

**Executive Mayors, Mayors and Councillors**

**The Director-General, Dr. Molefinyana Phera**

**Heads of Department and all senior government officials present**

**The Acting Provincial Commissioner of the SAPS**

**Senior Leadership of the SAPS**

**The Regional Commissioner of Correctional Services**

**Senior Leadership of Correctional Services**

**Leaders of the African National Congress and the Alliance, led by Comrade Polediso Motsoeneng**

**All our Special Guests**

**Esteemed Members of the media**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**Honourable Speaker**

This year marks the **50<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of the **June 16 Soweto Uprising**. What began as a peaceful student protest in **1976** against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, was met with shocking brutality.

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Many innocent young people were massacred, exposing the viciousness of the apartheid war machine, inspiring global condemnation, and setting in motion the courageous journey towards freedom and democracy.

Let the enduring spirit of resilience and the pursuit of justice for which those students gave their lives for find resonance in the youth of today.

We also commemorate the **70<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of the **1956 Women's Anti-Pass March** to the **Union Buildings** in **Pretoria**, where they rejected the extension of *dom-passes* to **African** women. They challenged the might of the apartheid regime right at the doorstep of the bastion of racism. **Re ananela le ho lebohela bophela ba mme Sophia de Bruyn, molwanedi wa mehleng a neng a le kgahlanong le kgethollo. Mohlabani wa tokoloho le demokrasi!**

We salute the courageous role that women continue to play towards the realisation of a truly egalitarian and non-sexist society.

Another historic milestone that we celebrate is the **70<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of the adoption of the **Freedom Charter** by the **African National Congress (ANC)** at its conference in **1956**. **The Freedom Charter** remains a beacon of hope to achieve the aspirations of all **South Africans**.

Indeed, as **Comrade President Oliver Tambo** once stated,

*"the Freedom Charter contains a fundamental perspective of the vast majority of the people of South Africa, of the kind of liberation that we all of us are fighting for. Hence it is not merely the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress and its allies. Rather it's the Charter of the people of South Africa for liberation."*

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We pay tribute to **Comrade Leon Levy**, who passed away on **02 February 2026**. **Comrade Levy** was a stalwart of the liberation struggle, and the last of the **five** signatories to the **Freedom Charter**.

Other four signatories are: **Chief Albert Luthuli** of the **ANC**, **Monty Naicker** of the **Natal Indian Congress**, **James La Guma** of the **South African Coloured People's Congress**, and **Pieter Beyleveld** of the **Congress of Democrats**.

We remain committed to the reburial in **Bloemfontein** of the mortal remains of **Mahlomola Leoatle**, who was in **Livingstone** in **Zimbabwe**, and **Sabata Thauthau** who was in **Zambia**.

These freedom fighters belonged to the **Madinoga** and **Luthuli Detachments**, respectively. This has been a long, tedious and delicate process for both their families and political organisations.

We are grateful for the patience exercised by their families in awaiting their turn to bury their loved ones with the dignity they so much deserve.

In their sacred memory, we dedicate the immortal words of **Laurence Binyon**, from his poem, ***For the Fallen***, which goes as follows: I quote:

*"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them."* **(Close Quote)**

Today, and always, we keep that promise. We remember them.

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This year also marks the **30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**, which has affirmed non-racialism, equality, non-sexism, and dignity for all.

We join the global community in mourning the **passing of Jesse Jackson**, a towering civil rights activist, international statesman and steadfast friend of South Africa.

### **Honourable Speaker**

This is the **"Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy."** This commitment is about the endless pursuit of an efficient, ethical, capable, participatory, responsive, transparent and accountable local government. It is about the desire to regain our pride.

The message is clear: the state of our municipalities is not encouraging.

Challenges that include poor financial management, weak governance systems, institutional instabilities, and inadequate provision of basic services, are crippling the capacity of municipalities to provide services.

While we understand that this is unacceptable, our caring government is working hard to turn the tide and make things right.

This is a timeless obligation enshrined in our **Constitution**. It is a moral obligation that should direct our collective efforts. Above all, it is a noble administrative responsibility that should shape our service delivery duty.

For many of our people, this is about trust tested by history, experiences and expectations for a new age full of promise and opportunity.

It is an honour to present this **State of the Province Address** today, conscious of the responsibility we carry and the challenges before us.

History will not absolve us; it will question us. It will ask us whether we have learnt from the hardships of our past, as we prepare the ground for a better future. Surely, we owe it to ourselves and the next generation to deliver an efficient and responsive government that serves its people.

We approach this **State of the Province** address with honesty, for no society shall ever renew itself through denial. We remain true to ourselves.

Not so long ago, the moral fibre and essence of our democracy was profoundly damaged by state capture. Institutions were hollowed out. Accountability was weakened. Public trust in government was eroded.

Here and now, we want to assure our people that on our watch such indignity shall not be permitted to thrive in any form or shape. Never!

### **Honourable Speaker**

Economic transformation to lift people out of poverty, create employment and overcome the burden of inequality remains our apex priority.

We acknowledge that this priority is compounded by multiple factors, such as the uncertainty of global economic conditions, national and provincial dynamics, including the current outbreak of **Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)** that is severely affecting the livestock value chain in the province.

Notwithstanding these ever-evolving challenges, progress towards the achievement of these priorities is noteworthy.

Unemployment is gradually decreasing, the low inflation target range of **3%** shall ease the costs of living, the social safety net continues to lift millions out of poverty, and reliability and stability of our power system is unprecedented.

Therefore, the work of the **7<sup>th</sup> Administration** is anchored on the need to drive inclusive growth and create jobs, reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living, and building a capable, ethical and developmental state.

We commit to implementing these priorities with compassion and determination. To serve the interests of our people, and nothing else.

History will judge us not by whether we have spoken well, but whether we have governed well; not whether we have promised enough, but whether we have delivered what we promised.

### **Priority 1: Drive inclusive growth and job creation**

#### **Honourable Speaker**

Inclusive economic growth creates jobs, provides opportunities, reduces poverty, and improves the standard of living.

This is what we want. And this is what we will create. It is our mission.

Success in this regard will require us to attract greater investment, raise incomes, improve living standards, create more jobs, reduce poverty and diminish inequality. This is the new page we are writing for our province.

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Last year, we declared that we would turn the tide against the scourge of unemployment. I am pleased today to report in this august **House** that this commitment we made, is a commitment we continue to fulfil.

Unemployment in the province fell from **38.5%** in the **2<sup>nd</sup> quarter** of **2025** to **36.2%** in the **3<sup>rd</sup> quarter** of the same year. This was a vital **2.3%** drop. For the **4<sup>th</sup> quarter**, we now sit at **37,2%**. While this is worrying, we are working extraordinarily hard to turn the tide against unemployment.

Driven by a lower inflation rate, we expect an improved provincial economic growth rate of **1.85%**.

With a rapidly growing portfolio, the **Free State** remains the preferred renewable energy investment destination in the county. We are a critical transportation hub connecting main economic centers in the country. We are also a key supplier of water with the biggest dam in the country, the **Gariiep Dam**.

Last year, we committed to creating **thirty thousand, one hundred and fifteen** jobs through the **Expanded Public Works Programme**. Today, I am pleased to announce that we have surpassed this target.

Through our collaborative efforts across the three spheres of government, we have created **forty-six thousand, one hundred and eighteen Expanded Public Works Programme** work opportunities in the province

Of these work opportunities, **twenty-two thousand, six hundred ninety-eight** were generated by the provincial government and municipalities.

This is indicative of the value of our strength. We will continue to align, work together, and build partnerships that work to create jobs.

Our target this year is ambitious. We aim to create **thirty-four thousand, four hundred and fourteen** work opportunities through the **Expanded Public Works Programme**.

### **Honourable Speaker**

The current outbreak of **Foot-and-Mouth (FMD)** disease presents extraordinary challenges to our livestock farmers. We support the integrated national **FMD** control, eradication, risk-based vaccination, and comprehensive surveillance, movement control strategy.

This **10-year** strategy will serve as road map for **South Africa** to obtain **FMD-free** status from the **World Organisation of Animal Health**.

We welcome the successful production of locally manufactured vaccines by the **Agricultural Research Council** after almost two decades.

As vaccine availability improves over the next few weeks, the **Free State Government** shall work with all stakeholders, including the **Provincial House of Traditional Leaders**, to continue the fight against **FMD**.

We are revitalising, growing and diversifying our agricultural sector. The role of women and youth farmers are continuously affirmed.

Financial support for women beneficiaries has increased to **34%** and, even more significant, financial support to youth farmers increased from less than **5%** to **31%** of our **Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme** conditional grant funding envelope. Our support will meet the **50%** and **40%** respective thresholds in the **2026/2027** financial year.

Food security is a matter of national priority. Growing and producing food is about ending poverty, creating economic opportunities, strengthening communities and ensuring our national resilience.

We are rejuvenating our food security initiatives, from backyard to community food gardens, including establishing and supporting vegetable gardens at schools and **Early Childhood Development (ECDs)** centres whilst linking food security projects to informal and formal markets.

This is illustrated by women like **Lydia Nkhoke** of **Ladybrand** who supplies the **Spar** in **Ladybrand** with vegetables whilst the **Mphatlalatsane Sheltered Employment** project, a group of youth and persons with disabilities, supplies **Pick 'n Pay** in **Viljoenskroon**.

I am also optimistic about young, determined and hungry men and women who have taken full advantage of government opportunities. One such young person is **Bokang Lehloenya** from **Welkom** in **Matjhabeng**. This bright young person is the brain behind **Wa Rona Motoho Wa Sebele** soft porridge, which has proven to be a favourite with our community. **Bokang** has received **R1,2 million rands** from the **Department of Agriculture and Rural Development** for processing equipment, and she previously won numerous awards such as **Top Achiever in Agro Processing** in the **2023/2024** financial year.

**Bokang, re ya o boka! Re motlotlo haholo ka wena.**

Our footprint has reached all corners of the **Free State**. We have concluded the distribution of agricultural input provided in the third phase

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of the **Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme** and reached **three thousand, one hundred and forty** beneficiaries.

In addition, **two thousand, two hundred and eighteen** farmers benefited from our extension and advisory services.

During the **2025/26** financial year, **thirty-one** youth-owned agricultural projects were supported. We recognise the contribution of **twelve young** entrepreneurs excelling in the agricultural sector, such as **Tumelo Pedi** from **Mangaung**, who was the overall winner of our **Youth in Agriculture Awards** last year, and **Jabu Matshinini** from **Bethlehem**, who was named **GrainSA's 2025 Potential New Era Farmer of the Year**.

The effects of climate change are felt in the agriculture sector and almost every other aspect of our daily lives. In this regard, we are pleased to announce that the transfer of the **Environmental Affairs** function to the **Department of Agriculture** has been finalised with the **Proclamation** amending **Schedule 2** of the **Public Service Act, 1994** on **10 July 2025**. Moving forward, we will integrate environmental sustainability with rural development and food security. Both **Agriculture** and **Environmental Affairs** must be part of the key economic drivers in the **Free State**.

### **Honourable Speaker**

As a province endowed with minerals, we are revitalising mining through small-scale mining support, opening new mining opportunities, re-using mining infrastructure, and curbing illegal mining.

Our province is endowed with significant amounts of liquified natural gas, which presents the Free State's **energy** landscape with immense

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investment opportunities in natural gas, solar power, uranium, hydropower, wind and hydrogen to power the future of the country.

We are no longer just an energy consumer, but also a national leader in renewable energy investment. This is **Just Energy Transition** in practice.

We are increasingly playing a strategic role in strengthening the national electricity grid through a well-structured renewable energy portfolio.

As of **January 2026**, the province (through the **DTIC**) is tracking **twenty-nine** renewable energy projects with capital investment in excess of **R100 billion**, mobilised largely through private sector participation.

Ongoing and planned projects like the **Khauta Solar Project**, **Springbok Solar Plant**, and **Mulilo Battery Energy Storage Project** continue to transform our landscape for the better.

We are reigniting growth through, amongst others, strategic development corridors. These corridors are key in unlocking our investment potential, creating jobs, improving connectivity, and facilitating trade.

With the largest dam in **South Africa**, the **Gariiep Dam**, **three** national roads, which are the **N1**, **N6** and **N8**, and vast renewable energy potential, the **Karoo Development Corridor** in the southern part of the province connects the **Free State** with the **Northern Cape** and **Eastern Cape**.

Seeing this potential, the **three** provinces are jointly driving mutually beneficial tourism initiatives that includes mixed-use development,

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biodiversity-based tourism, heritage-based tourism, and water-based recreation anchored on the development prospects of the **Gariiep Dam**.

The **Airport Node** and the N8 upgrading of road infrastructure initiatives form part of the **Mangaung Development Corridor**, connecting the **Free State, Northern Cape and Lesotho**.

The **PV solar energy facility by Springbok Solar Power Plant** and **Harmony's** prospects of mining surface gold for the next **100** years are taking place along the **Energy and Minerals Development Corridor**.

These **multi-year initiatives** are structured across **several phases**. We remain on track to engage with essential partners in this endeavor, such as the **Infrastructure South Africa (ISA)**, the **DTIC**, and others.

### **Motsamaisi wa Dipuisano**

Re tswelletse ho aha moruo o ka kgonahatsang kgolo ya dikgwebo tse nyane. Hona ke ho netefatsa kgolo ya moruo bakeng sa bohle.

Dikgwebo tse nyane tse makgolo a tsheletseng le mashome a robong a metso e mmedi (692) di tsheheditse ka boikamahanyo le melao, mme tse mashome a mane a metso e mene (44) di fumantshitswe tshehetso ya ditjhelete.

Tshehetso ya ditjhelete e boetse ya fumantshwa di spaza shop tse mashome a mahlano le metso e tsheletseng (56) ka Letlole La Tshehetso ya Di-Spaza Shop.

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**Re kgothalletsa ho re beng ba di spaza shop be ingodise e le hore ba une molemo letloleng lena. Ba tlohele ho hirisa matlo a bona ba nke monyetla wa ho ruisa bona!**

As we continue to write an inclusive economic agenda for the future, we have identified **twenty** most procured commodities by the **Provincial Government** that include stationery, surgical gloves, soap, toilet paper, and masks for increased local production and sourcing.

Through the **Department of Economic Development and Tourism**, we will accelerate the process to identify and assist women and youth to open factories.

Last year, the **Free State Development Corporation** concluded a **R2,5 million rands** investment with **JC Plastiques**, a plastic moulding company, and another **R11 million rands** investment with **D-Line Designs** textile company.

We have completed the upgrading and refurbishment of **two** factories at the **Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone (MAP-SEZ)** to accommodate **NNTA Rabbit Abattoir** and **Rovno Sauce** companies.

This work includes improvement and maintenance of roads, as we continue to reposition the **MAP-SEZ** as a prime investment hub.

We are determined to significantly increase the number of jobs from the current **one thousand five hundred and twenty-seven** in the **MAP-SEZ**.

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Work is at an advanced stage to appoint the **Chief Executive Officer** for the **MAP-SEZ**, as part of our deliberate efforts to place the **SEZ** on a firm path towards growth and development.

### **Honourable Speaker**

We want only the best for our youth. Our role is to help them thrive to see the future they desire.

This has started. **Fifty** young entrepreneurs in **Mangaung** and **ninety** in **Fezile Dabi** were each supported with **R15 000** worth of equipment through the **Informal Micro Enterprises Development Programme**. **Thirty (30)** youth also benefited from the cellphone repair programme.

**Hundred and thirty-six** agricultural graduates were offered workplace experience through the **Agriculture Graduate Placement Programme** at a cost of **twelve million, one hundred ninety-nine thousand rands**.

Last month, **twenty-three** compulsory community service veterinarians commenced their service in the **Department of Agriculture**.

Our partnership with **TVET colleges and universities** will focus on creating business and workplace-ready graduates by focusing on industry-aligned qualifications, entrepreneurship skills, and private sector partnership.

### **Honourable Speaker**

We hosted the **Property Investment Summit** on **27 November 2025**, during which **sixteen** public properties that includes the **Macufe Site**, **Jim Fouche Resort**, vacant land on the **N8**, vacant land next to the **Free State University**, **Kopano Complex** in **Welkom** and **Naledi Sun** were

showcased to potential investors for various development models such as **Build, Operate, Transfer**; and **Refurbish, Operate, Transfer**.

We are now busy with **Phase 2** implementation, which entails the registration of **PPP** with **National Treasury** and conducting feasibility studies to determine which properties can be advertised in a short period.

The valuation of these properties has been completed, and a competitive bidding process will be concluded this year. Repurposing these properties will transform our urban spaces and stimulate economic growth.

**The Executive Council (EXCO)** has resolved to undertake a comprehensive review of all existing **lease agreements for government office accommodation** across the province. This decision arises from growing concerns that a number of these properties do not fully comply with occupational health and safety standards, yet we continue to incur substantial rental costs for their use. Public funds must not be utilised to sustain non-compliant private infrastructure.

In this regard, we are exploring the possibility of building a government precinct that will consolidate departments into facilities that meet regulatory requirements and ensure long-term value for money.

We are embarking on a process to relocate officials of the Department of Health from privately owned facilities to Universitas Academic Hospital as part of our broader strategy to reduce reliance on private leases and improve overall compliance with occupational and safety standards.

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Furthermore, we have resolved that the offices of the Xhariep District for the Department of Education must be relocated from Bloemfontein to Xhariep. This relocation must be concluded within the next few months.

It is both morally and practically indefensible to expect residents of Xhariep to travel outside their own district to access essential services.

Government services must be brought closer to the people.

### **Honourable Speaker**

Through our subsidy to **Interstate Bus Lines** in **Mangaung** and **Maluti Bus Services** in **Thabo Mofutsanyana**, we will continue to fund public transport that benefits more than **twenty-four thousand** daily commuters.

This vital investment bridges peri-urban divides, enabling low-income families to access jobs, education, and economic opportunities.

The frequency of fatal crashes on the **N8** continues to be a significant concern. It is imperative that we collaborate with law enforcement to enhance road safety.

As we reflect on the past **Festive Season**, from **01 December 2025 to mid-January 2026**, we must first acknowledge the partnership between law enforcement and our government. The visible participation of political principals on our roads played a vital role in boosting the morale of our law enforcement officers during this demanding period.

Our **integrated approach** combined high-density law enforcement with road safety awareness. We intensified visibility at truck stops, taxi ranks, and major routes, distributing updated safety messages to combat

fatigue and poor weather conditions. However, the statistics show that risky behaviour persists. The top offences remain excessive speed, driver fitness, and vehicle fitness.

The **death toll on our roads** is not just a statistic but a concern. We will strengthen our operations, but we need every motorist and pedestrian to take personal responsibility. We will not rest until our roads are safe.

I thank our traffic officers. We all benefit from the long hours you spend on our roads in pursuit of law and order, and the preservation of lives.

In the **2026/2027** financial year, we will complete the roll-out of speed detection and alcohol testing equipment, as well as investing in capacity building for traffic officers, examiners and road safety officials. Importantly, we will harness digital technologies to elevate enforcement and safety.

Investment in our road infrastructure is not an option; it is a must. Our road networks are a vital link for inclusive growth prospects. So, ambitious investment plans in our road infrastructure, and rural roads, continue.

In **2025/2026**, our capital projects created **one thousand and thirteen** jobs, surpassing our target of **eight hundred and twenty-six** jobs.

Last year, we completed **eight Township Revitalization Programme** initiatives, creating **hundred and thirty** jobs in **Botshabelo, Thaba Nchu, Bloemfontein, Sasolburg, Kroonstad, Ladybrand, Trompsburg** and **Bethlehem**. This **Programme** will continue in the coming financial year.

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We are pleased to announce that the reseal and fog spray projects of the following roads were completed in the **2025/26** financial:

- **Kroonstad – Bothaville**
- **Dealesville - Bloemfontein**
- **Jagersfontein – Bloemfontein**
- **Hoopstad – Bultfontein**
- **Zastron – Wepener**
- **Sasolburg – Deneysville**

For the **2026/27 financial year**, we have allocated **R1.4 billion rands** to complete existing projects. Focus will be on rural roads, small towns connectivity, and pothole eradication to drive agricultural growth, enable trade, eradicate poverty, and facilitate access to essential services.

Again, **ten** new road construction and maintenance projects will be procured towards the end of the **2026/27 financial** year.

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

### **Honourable Speaker**

Poverty is a scourge. It limits access to necessities, drives income inequality, reduces development attainments, and erodes human dignity.

High costs of living also hold us back. Low household income leads to low purchasing power, low savings, and increasing living costs.

It is therefore no coincidence that our social protection interventions and programmes are intended to reduce poverty, facilitate economic

inclusion, increase access to opportunities, and build a more equitable society.

Of the **three million** people of the **Free State**, **one million, forty-four thousand and six** are recipients of social grants. Many of the beneficiaries are children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Care for the most vulnerable in our society is our outmost priority.

We will create the link to economic opportunities and job creation for recipients of social grants who are able to participate in the economy.

We are funding **fifty Community Nutrition Development Centres** across all districts that provide cooked nutritious meals to the **nine thousand and sixty-seven** poor and vulnerable in our communities at a cost of twelve **million, six hundred and forty-eight thousand rands**.

These **Centres** are anchors of community hope and stability.

### **Honourable Speaker**

The **Conference for Employees with Disabilities**, arranged by the **Office of the Premier** last year, was about inclusion, innovation, support and productivity in the workplace. We are doing our part.

Recommendations made at this **Conference** are now being implemented.

In this financial year, we will complete the development of a **Provincial Disability Framework** to mainstream disability rights, promote equal opportunities, and improve access to services for persons with disabilities.

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We are supporting the **twenty-nine Protective Workshops** meant to ensure employment and skills development for persons with disabilities.

### **Honourable Speaker**

Dignity and respect for our older persons is equally important. This is the measure of our humanity – **Botho!**

We held a successful **Older Persons Dialogue**, arranged by the **Office of the Premier**, in recognition of our older persons in **October 2025**.

This was followed by engagement on services offered to older persons by departments and **Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality**. Services presented ranged from social support to healthcare programmes.

We cannot afford to remain numb to the abuse and killings of older persons in our communities. We have therefore partnered with **thirty-six NPOs** to provide 24-hour residential care to **eight hundred** older persons.

Another **hundred and fifty-three NPOs** provide community-based care support to **four thousand, four hundred and sixty-four** older persons.

In celebration of the festive season and recognition of the role played by older persons in society, the **Office of the Premier** hosted a series of joyful **Christmas lunches** in **Soutpan, Van Stadensrus** and **Bloemfontein** in **December 2025**.

## Honourable Speaker

The provision of **adequate healthcare** for our people is a top priority. In our efforts to capacitate the public health system, we have employed medical personnel in many of our facilities across the province.

In the **2025/26 financial year**, we made the following appointments:

- **Nine medical specialists.**
- **Hundred and twenty Medical Doctors.**
- **Fifty-five Nursing staff.**
- **Absorption of two thousand, one hundred and twenty-eight Community Healthcare Workers.**
- **Recruitment of three hundred and seventy-nine student nurses**
- **Permanent appointment of forty-five COVID-19 contract workers.**

We have also appointed a competent and qualified principal at the **Free State School of Nursing**. In addition, a total of **two hundred and three** nursing students successfully completed their academic training.

These efforts are a clear indication of a government at work. A government that puts its people first.

We are proud to announce the successful implementation of the **e-Impilo Electronic Patient Record** system at **thirty** clinics across the province. This milestone brings us closer to a fully integrated patient care system.

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In addition, we have also deployed the **Hospital Management System 2 (HMS2)** at **eighteen** of our **thirty-three** hospitals, strengthening our capacity for efficient hospital operations and patient management. The deployment of this system to the remaining hospitals will continue this year.

In **November last year**, we joined the **Minister of Health, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi** in launching the **Six Multi-Month Dispensing** healthcare strategy in the **Free State** to reduce patient burden and optimise resources. The launch heralded the start of a new model designed to streamline pharmaceutical supply and patient management in the public health sector.

### **Honourable Speaker**

We stand in support of the classification of **Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)** as a national disaster.

Women are under attack. Stories of **GBVF** are disturbing. This scourge needs to stop. We must break down the cultural, institutional and societal practices that continue to entrap women in abusive relationships.

We need to assure our women and children that we will protect and care for them.

In **December 2025**, we hosted a **Provincial Men's Indaba** as part of the **16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children**, where President Cyril Ramaphosa joined **five thousand** men and said, **"Not in Our Name!"**

And as part of our resolution to roll-out the **Indaba** programme across all the districts, we hosted the **Matjhabeng Men's Indaba** earlier this month.

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We will not stop fighting **GBVF**. Our focus will be on prevention, victim support, and strengthening the criminal justice system under the hashtag: **#It Starts with Me” GBVF 365 Days Campaign.**

**Re utlwile bohloko, ebile re tshwela ka mathe polao ya modula setulo wa QwaQwa United Taxi Association, Mme Matshediso Nteo. Ha moya wa haye o robale ka kgotso.**

We will develop a **Mobile App**, which will allow users to send, alert and get immediate assistance; and forge partnerships with traditional leadership, religious sectors and the taxi industry to combat the **GBVF**.

**GBVF** activists will be placed in police stations for immediate and on-the-ground support working with district **GBVF Coordinators** in the **Office of the Premier** and the **Department of Social Development**.

In our ongoing effort to address compensation budget, and to align human resources with service delivery priorities, **forty-five Security Officers** were transferred from the **Department of Community Safety, Roads and Transport** to the **Department of Social Development**, where the demand for security services was most critical. This intervention was implemented with the approved budget and has strengthened safeguarding capacity, protecting state assets, and ensuring the safety of personnel and the public.

The intervention also represents a strategic reallocation of existing resources to areas of greatest need.

Through this measure, we reaffirm our commitment to prudent financial management, optimal utilisation of personnel, and responsive service delivery.

## Honourable Speaker

Our education results are outstanding. We achieved an impressive **89.33% Grade 12** pass rate for the **Class of 2025** and remain amongst the top performing provinces in the country. We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate **KZN** as the top performing province, whilst noting that our **91%** record set by the class of **2024** remains intact!

We awarded **200 bursaries** to deserving learners for the **2025 academic year**, and this year we are proud to announce that we have increased the number to **300** for the **2026 academic year**.

We must applaud **Bokang Mokubung** of **Bluegumbosch Secondary School** in **Qwaqwa**, for obtaining first position in **Mathematics and Physical Sciences** in **Quintile 3** schools in the country against all odds.

**Re motlotlo ka wena Mokubung!** We also congratulate **Mr. Lerato Ramabodu**, an educator from **Makwane Secondary School** in **Qwaqwa**, for obtaining **100%** pass rate in **Physical Science** for nine consecutive years since **2017**.

Our heartfelt congratulations go to **six** learners from the **Sentinel Primary School** in **QwaQwa**, for representing not only our province, but our country at the **Robotics Competition** in **Singapore** last year.

Let me take this opportunity on behalf of our government to thank our school principals, teachers, SGBs, parents, and learners for their hard work, patience and commitment. You remain an inspiration to us all.

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Access to education of the highest quality remains one of our top priorities in the province. Our strategic reorientation shift is now on **ECDs** and primary education, and this outlook is paying off. Through our **ECDs** awareness campaigns and **Bana Pele Mass Registration** drive in **2025**, **ninety-seven thousand, five hundred and forty** children are accessing **Early Learning Programmes** in the province.

A total of **one thousand, six hundred and forty-two ECDs** registered to become eligible for funding allocation of **six hundred forty-two million, one hundred and four thousand rands** in **2026/27**.

Since the **migration of the ECD function** from **Social Development** to the **Department of Education**, the province has refurbished and provided maintenance to **sixty-two ECD Centres** throughout the province, with **thirteen** completed in the **current financial year**.

These initiatives, which will be intensified in **2026**, will go a long way to ensure that our learners can thrive by the age of **five**, laying a solid foundation for early learning and stimulation of emergent literacy and numeracy skills.

It is with heavy hearts that we reflect on a profound tragedy that befell our education family in the **Lejweleputswa District** late last year.

On **29 October 2025**, **six** dedicated **ECD** practitioners from Matjhabeng, **Daphney Malimabe, Matshepo and Nkalimeng Hlapi, Kolisang Seipati, Seipati Filita and Thenjiwe Mamatu**, lost their lives in a fatal car accident while traveling to **Durban**.

We honour the memory of these women who dedicated their lives to nurturing the youngest minds of our province.

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We have initiated **Operation Tharollo Programme** in all **four hundred and forty-eight Quintile 1-3 primary** schools to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. This **Operation** will run for a period of **five** years with a total budget of **one hundred and five million rands**.

Investment in school infrastructure matters because it improves learning environment, education outcomes and access to education.

As indicated last year, the following new schools are at various stages of planning for the **MTEF** period. To date, these projects have been handed over to the respective implementing agents for execution.

- **Langenhoven Park Comprehensive School** in **Mangaung**
- **Kgotso Taole Technical Secondary School** in **Mangaung**
- **Thuto ke Lesedi Technical Secondary School** in **Fezile Dabi**

To ensure that learning and teaching take place in safe, dignified, and conducive environments, we continue to replace inappropriate structures and schools built with material such as asbestos in the following schools:

- **Dr Blok Secondary School** in **Bloemfontein**
- **Olympia Primary School** in **Bloemfontein**
- **Tlotlanang Secondary School** in **Thaba Nchu**

We have also commenced with the reconstruction of **two** unsafe schools in **Botshabelo**, namely: **Thato** and **Popano Secondary Schools**.

After numerous engagements regarding completion of delayed infrastructure projects, I am pleased to announce that the following underperforming projects were terminated, and replacement contractors are in the process of being appointed:

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- **Western Holdings Primary School in Welkom**
- **Tsebo Ulwazi Technical Secondary School in Frankfort**
- **Tshehetso Primary School in Bothaville**
- **Breda Secondary Farm School Hostel in Fouriesburg**

## **Honourable Speaker**

We are a proud society built on the values of equality, respect and human rights. Our sports, cultural and recreational programmes continue to connect us to drive social cohesion in the province.

Last year, we committed to delivering **MACUFE**. We successfully staged **MACUFE** in **September 2025**, which was a celebration of a medley of our cultural heritage and diversity that colours our province.

A total of **80%** of performers at the festival were **Free State** artists. We forged a strong partnership with **twenty-four** community media houses.

Employment and business opportunities were also created for **Free Staters**. According to a previous **Socio-Economic Impact Assessment study** by the **University of the Free State's Centre for Development Support**, the economic impact of **MACUFE** is beneficial to accommodation establishments, restaurants, retailers, filling stations and more. We will therefore roll-out **MACUFE** at full scale this year.

We are also transforming the **Free State** into a mecca of sporting events.

We hosted the **Bafana Bafana FIFA World Cup** qualifier match against **Nigeria** on **09 September 2025**, and the match between **Bafana Bafana** and **Lesotho** on **05 September 2025**. We were also the proud host of the national **Athletics School Sport Championships** in **April 2025**.

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This coming **Sunday**, on **22 February 2026**, our **Proteas Women Cricket Team** is competing against **Pakistan** at the **Mangung Oval** here in **Bloemfontein**. Let us all show our support, wear our green and gold, and raise our voices to remind our girls that they are playing at the home of sports!

We wish the team all of the best and assure them that the **Free State** will support them all the way!

### **Honourable Speaker**

The crime statistics for the period ending **September 2025** show glimmers of hard-won progress. But we will not hide behind these gains.

**Contact crimes overall show a slight decrease.** We have seen a **12.6% decrease in murder**, a hard-won gain that reflects focused effort. However, this is offset by a **20.5% increase in attempted murder**. This shows a move towards more extreme, premeditated violence crimes.

**Sexual offences** represent our deepest moral failure. While sexual offences fell by **2.8%**, the actual **eight hundred and ninety** reported **cases in three months** are shocking. The breakdown is more telling in that rape figures remain high, and sexual assault cases dropped significantly.

**Robbery at residential premises decreased by 24.6%**, a positive sign of targeted policing. However, **robbery at non-residential premises increased by 9.2%**, shifting the threat to businesses and public spaces.

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**Stock theft** remains a critical and prevalent crime in the Free State, posing a serious threat to rural livelihoods and food security, especially in areas along the Lesotho border. A concerted collective effort is essential to reverse this trend.

The cost of crime is considerable. It reduces economic growth, disrupts trade, impedes investment and damages infrastructure. We will not be defined by these numbers, but rather by our relentless response. We will stand together to fight crime. We will stop criminals, make our streets safe, and work together with our law enforcement agencies.

The repurposing of the **Sonskyn Police Station** in the **hotspot area** of **Bloemspruit** in **October 2025**, from a satellite to a fully-fledged police station, will go a long way in our fight against crime.

### **Priority 3: Building a capable, ethical and development state**

#### **Honourable Speaker**

A capable, ethical and developmental state is all too important for us to provide efficient and effective public service.

Governance will never be effective without an efficient local government. In **July 2025**, the **Joint Oversight Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Standing Committee on Auditor-General**, undertook an oversight visit to our province.

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We have heard and understand the recommendations made by the **Joint Oversight Portfolio Committee**. Work to rewrite the story of our local government and turn around municipalities has begun.

The urgent task is to ensure sound financial management, stabilise the political and administrative divide, institute investigations into cases of maladministration and implement consequence management.

We are implementing the required interventions in the administration of municipalities struggling to deliver basic services, strengthen governance, increase municipal revenue, and improve audit outcomes.

The following municipalities have been placed under **Section 139** of the **Constitution: Nala, Matjhabeng, Masilonyana, Tokologo, Mafube, Nketoana and Kopanong.**

This will help us implement recovery plans unhindered by ineffective governance and oversight, maladministration, and political interference.

The stability and sustainability of municipalities is all too important for us to restore trust in local government. People deserve better.

In the **2026/27** financial year, our continued support and focus will be on the following districts and local municipalities: **Xhariep, Letsemeng, Mohokare, Kopanong, Tokologo, Masilonyana, Thabo Mofutsanyana, Dihlabeng, Metsimaholo and Mafube.**

The **Community Development Workers (CDWs)** remain an important cohort of public servants that connects the aspirations of our people to the pulse of the state.

Despite some challenges, the dedication of our **CDWs** has not faltered. We have noted a marked improvement in the consistency and quality of monthly reporting, which proves that the spirit of service remains robust.

### **Honourable Speaker**

We are hard at work to accelerate municipal infrastructure delivery.

At the end of **June 2025**, **93%** of the total **Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG)**, had been spent. Our bold infrastructure implementation plans to provide water, sanitation, roads and stormwater, high mast lights, solid waste disposal, and pedestrian bridges are beginning to pay off.

As part of the implementation of these infrastructure projects, **two thousand, four hundred and eighty-one** job opportunities were created.

We are building with ambition and vision for the benefit of our people.

The **nine hundred and forty-nine million, four hundred and sixty-nine thousand rands** of the **MIG** allocation for the **2026/2027** municipal financial year will be used to improve our municipal infrastructure.

We are also pleased with the **Ministerial Intervention** through **Vaal Central** to improve the conditions of the **Wastewater Treatment** plants in the **Matjhabeng** and **Maluti-a-Phofung** local municipalities. We have approached the **Ministry of Defence** for discussions regarding infrastructure support for the **Matjhabeng Municipality**, as part of efforts to address these challenges.

We are completing **nineteen thousand, and five hundred** serviced sites this year to enable us to catch up with **Wastewater Treatment** plants.

Steady progress is being made with bucket eradication in **Mangaung, Nketoana, Setsoto** and **Tokologo** with the help of the **Department of Water and Sanitation**.

The **Department** also completed the following projects:

- **Refurbishment of the Fika Patso Water Treatment Works in Qwaqwa.**
- **Repair and replacement of ageing water pipelines at Tlholong Extension 4 in Kestell**
- **Welbedacht Pipeline Phase 1 replacement of nearly 33.8 km of pipeline from Lieuwkop Chamber to Brandkop Reservoir to improve water supply to residents of Mangaung Metro**
- **Refurbishment of the Brandfort Wastewater Treatment Works**

For the **2026/27** financial year and beyond, the **Department of Water and Sanitation** will implement **fifty-one** water and sanitation infrastructure projects across the province.

### **Honourable Speaker**

We are implementing mechanisms to appoint competent senior municipal officials and fill vacant positions to strengthen municipal capability.

As we continue to transform our municipal landscape for the better, we are delighted that the following **eight** municipalities have fully filled senior

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management positions: **Lejweleputswa, Tokologo, Tswelopele, Dihlabeng, Mantsopa, Nketoana, Phumelela and Fezile Dabi.**

**Twenty-two** municipalities supported with the institutionalisation of the municipal performance management system. Support also included change management provided to all municipalities.

We have appointed and deployed graduate engineers in municipalities to provide technical support in infrastructure planning and maintenance, water and sanitation, quantity surveying, construction, and project management.

All district municipalities and the **Mangaung Metro** have developed their **3<sup>rd</sup> Generation One Plans**, which were approved by the **Executive Council**.

Our **Traditional and Khoisan Leaders** are the guardians of culture and traditions, and agents of cohesion and development in a democracy. The **Executive Council** recently approved of the amendment bill of the **Free State House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders** and the bill will be tabled for consideration by the Legislature.

In **November** last year, we established **Mangaung Local House of Traditional Leaders** to advise the **Mangaung Metro** on matters of customs, traditional leadership and customary initiation.

We are satisfied that, working with our **Traditional and Khoisan Leaders**, we managed to notably decrease the number of deaths during the winter customary initiation season. We recorded **four deaths during the Winter Season** and **seventeen during the Summer Season**.

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While this is a decrease, every death is one too many. We will not rest until we achieve **zero deaths** and eliminate criminality in initiation schools.

### Honourable Speaker

We value sound financial management. Every rand counts in improving the delivery of services, growing the economy and financial security.

Positive results to ensure compliance with the financial management prescripts are being realised. This is evident in our **2024/25** audit outcomes. Out of **thirteen** departments, including the **Free State Legislature**, **three** departments received clean audit outcomes.

Notably, the **Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs** became the first service delivery department to achieve a clean audit for the **2024/2025** financial year.

**Seven** departments achieved unqualified audit outcomes and **three** were qualified. Of the **five** entities, **one** achieved a clean audit, **two** achieved unqualified audits, and another **two** achieved qualified audits.

The **two** unqualified audits by **Fleet Management** and **Medical Depot** are an improvement from the previous audit findings.

From these outcomes, there is no doubt that a lot more still needs to be done. But we will not tire, we will not rest, and we will not yield. **Siza kusebenza, Honourable Speaker!**

Signs of significant improvements are also evident at municipal level.

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All municipalities were able to submit their **2024/25 Annual Financial Statements** to the **Auditor General** as prescribed in the **MFMA**. This is a major improvement from the previous **2023/24** municipal financial year.

### **Motsamaisi wa Dipuisano**

**Re tswelletse ho fana ka tshehetso ya bodisa, eleng oversight, le ya setekgeniki, le ho kenella tsamaisong ya bomasepala e le ho akofisa puso e ntle le tsamaiso e hlwekileng ya ditjhelete.**

**Hona ho kenyelletsa tshehetso ho tsa ho bokella matlole ka ho beha dikepele, eleng di-tariffs, tse nepahetseng, ho nyalanya lenane la boleng ba thepa, eleng valuation roll, le ditefello, le ka ho nka monyetla wa thesetso ya dikoloto ya motlakase le metsi e etswang ke Eskom le Lefapha La Metsi.**

**Re tswelletse ho kwetlisa diofisiri tsa ditjhelete, tekolo ya dibuka le ditshohanyetso, eleng risk, ho netefatsa hore ho ba le boikamahanyo (compliance), boporofeshenale le phumantsho ya ditshebelletso.**

Collaboration with institutions such as **AGSA, National Treasury, SALGA**, and professional bodies to ensure the stability, integrity, and efficiency of public financial management will also continue. We are working together with the **Mangaung Metro** to speedily implement **AGSA** findings. In particular, we have encouraged the municipality to urgently conduct a skills audit of senior managers.

**Honourable Speaker**

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Having access to a decent, safe and affordable home is not only a matter of human need, but also the basis of security, dignity, and opportunities.

Many houses are being built, and many have a place called home.

Now, **Nkgono Lucy Nkosana** of **Ezibeleni, in Zastron** is a proud homeowner, thanks to the **Free State Provincial Government. Re fana ka matlo le ditshebeletso beke le beke!**

At the ripe age of **83**, **Ntate Litsiki Tello of Backenpark** in **Bethlehem** has, for the first time in his life, a house of his own.

**Mme Mamokete Emily Motlounng** of **Bohlokong** also received keys to a new BNG house.

These are but few of the hundreds of beneficiaries whose lives we are transforming. Home ownership is now within reach for many.

Our two-room demolition project with the National **Department of Human Settlements** and **Mangaung Metro** in **Botshabelo** is well in advance.

**Morero ona o kenyelletsa ho tlosa marulelo a kotsi a asbestos. Ha re na ho tlosa marulelo a asbestos feela, empa hape re tla haha matlo a macha a mashome a robeli (80).**

**Tswelopele ho fihlela joale e ya bonahala. Re tlositse marulelo a asbestos matlong a mashome a robong (90) a Matoporong, Reddersburg le Matwabeng, Senekal.**

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We are honoring and restoring the dignity of our military veterans through the provision of housing. We have completed and handed over **thirty** houses to military veterans in this **2025/2026** financial year.

**Ntate Sebakeng Kaibe** who spent his youth in exile fighting for freedom is one such individual. This government saw it fit to give **Ntate Kaibe** and others who fought for freedom the dignity of having roofs over their heads.

These houses are connected with water, sewer, electricity and solar panels. This work will continue in the coming financial year.

The **Bakenpark Extension 6&7** project in **Bethlehem** is almost complete. We value delivery of water and sewer infrastructure to enable housing construction on the **one thousand, two hundred forty-eight** sites.

As stated last year, the **Community Residential Units** project has been completed in **Welkom (G-Hostel)** and **Bloemfontein (Dark and Silver City)**. We will open the **1<sup>st</sup> Phase** of these projects in **March** this year.

Discussions are at an advanced stage with **Eskom** to energise **G-Hostel**. Approval by **Eskom** will assist in enabling us to provide accommodation to **two hundred and seventy** eligible tenants.

We are building houses for the **twenty-seven** families that have severely been affected by the mine dam disaster in **Allanridge** in **Matjhabeng**. A contractor has been appointed, and **five** houses have been built by the municipality. Others will be completed before the end of the next financial year.

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The **R20 million rands** commitment by **Harmony** will also assist in the construction of houses for those affected by this mine dam disaster.

### **Motsamaisi wa Dipuisano**

Re kgathile tema ho lokisa phoso ya ho fapanya mangolo a thuo ya mobu, eleng title deeds, ka ho otloloha motseng wa Thaba Nchu. Ditekolo tse lokelang di phethetswe, le maqhwetha a thontswe hore ho tle ho akofiswe ditokiso tsa boemo boo.

Ho fihla ha jwale re se re tjhaetse monwana mangolo a thuo ya mobu a makgolo a mararo le mashome a robedi a metso e robedi (388).

Re ipeletsa ho baahi ba tshwereng mangolo a bitswang "Deeds of Grant" hore ba tle ba fetole mangolo ao hore ebe a phethahetseng a thuo ya mobu, mme seo se tla etswa kante ho tefiso.

Re boetse re kene letsholong la "Title Deeds Friday" motseng wa Botshabelo, ka kopanelo le lefapha la naha la Phumantsho ya Bodulo.

Mona Mangaung, re nehelane ka mangolo a thuo ya mobu a fetang dikete tse hlano le makgolo a robedi le mashome a tsheletseng. Mme re sa ntse re tla tswella ho fana ka tse ding.

### **Honourable Speaker**

For a developmental state to succeed, it needs skilled, ethical, accountable, responsive, dedicated, and compassionate professionals.

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I am pleased to announce that we have appointed **Dr. Molefinyana Phera** as the **Director-General** of the provincial government.

The committed, capable and hard-working **Dr. Phera** will provide leadership, ensure stability, and inspire confidence throughout the provincial government.

Vacant positions of **Heads of Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, Health** and that of **Social Development** have also been filled.

While we successfully filled the post of **Head of Department of Economic Development and Tourism**, we regret that the incumbent resigned at the end of last year to pursue other career opportunities. The process of appointing a suitably qualified candidate to lead this **Department**, and that of **Provincial Treasury**, has commenced.

In our commitment to improve efficiency, ease of doing business, and productivity of the public sector, the project to upgrade our **Local Area Network** has started. The outcome of this project will be a modernised infrastructure, and improved network reliability, performance and security.

The **Free State Training and Development Institute (FSTDI)** continues to enhance government capacity through the provision of specialised training and development courses to build the capacity of the state.

Internally, we commenced with the skills audit on the **3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2025**. **Two hundred and eighty SMS members** have completed the skills audit questionnaire. The first cohort of competency assessments is

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in progress and will cover **one hundred and sixteen SMS members**. **Sixty-one SMS members** have completed the assessment to date.

The second cohort of competency assessment will commence from the **1<sup>st</sup> of April 2026** for the remaining **two hundred and three SMS members**, and other occupational groups will follow.

The **FSTDI** is implementing the **NQF Level 7** degree-equivalent qualification programme. **Two** groups have completed the programme, and a third cohort of **ten** participants is scheduled to commence this year.

We are also excited about our recent accreditation for the new **Occupational Certificate: General Manager Course at NQF Level 6**.

Our work in partnership with the **National School of Government** has led to delivery of some of the following courses: **Citizen Centred Service Delivery, Personal Mastery, Supply Chain Management, Project Management, and Coaching for Leadership Development**.

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

We are equipping our young people with skills. In the **2024/2025** financial year, **six thousand, three hundred and seventy-four** unemployed youth benefited from our skills development programmes.

I am pleased to report that we currently have **four thousand, and ninety-nine** unemployed youth benefiting from our various **Graduate**

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**Internship, Work Integrated Learning, Apprenticeships, Learnerships, Short Skills, and Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning Programmes.**

We have also embarked on a new **Candidacy Programme**, supporting **fifteen** engineers to be professionally registered. All these programmes have been implemented across all the **five** districts of the province.

A total of **one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-six** students are currently being assisted to settle outstanding debts with higher education institutions, enabling them to obtain their qualifications.

The total investment in these programmes amounts to **three hundred and fifty million, six hundred and eighty-nine thousand, six hundred and seventeen rands.**

In the new financial year, we will assist **seven thousand, eight hundred** young people by placing them in different skills development programmes to prepare them for life in the workplace. Will also appoint more than **sixty-seven** engineering interns to help distressed municipalities.

A total of **526** public servants have applied for the early retirement package and we have resolved to approve these applications as part of a deliberate workforce renewal strategy.

This will create space for the absorption of young, skilled professionals into the public service and help us address youth unemployment. We will

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manage this process responsibly to ensure continuity of service delivery, proper skills transfer and the preservation of critical institutional memory.

## Honourable Speaker

We had the pleasure of hosting the **G20 Diplomatic Cultural Roadshow** in **August** of last year. This presented our province with an opportunity to showcase our cultural heritage, diversity and economic opportunities.

The roadshow further strengthened our international profile and demonstrated once again our ability to host high-level diplomatic events.

We similarly coordinated a series of successful outgoing missions to **Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia** and **Cuba**. These missions were meant to strengthen diplomatic relations, expand trade opportunities, and deepen cooperation in key sectors of mutual interest.

We also had the distinct honour of receiving the **Ambassador Extraordinaire** of the **People’s Republic of China**, and the **Ambassador of Cuba** during courtesy calls this month. These engagements reaffirm our relations, and shared commitment for collaboration, development and people-to-people exchange.

This year, we will prioritise strategic outward visits to foreign and development partners to align with our provincial priorities. This, we will do, with the ultimate intention to drive inclusive growth and job creation.

## Conclusion

## Honourable Speaker

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We are compelled to acknowledge that the trajectory of our province is neither incidental nor complete. It is a project of transformation shaped by human agency, sustained by sacrifice, and driven by a determination to attain social justice, human dignity, and shared prosperity.

We can boldly state, without a shadow of doubt, that this administration has registered measurable progress thus far. Our institutions have been consolidated, developmental interventions expanded, and the material conditions of many of our people progressively altered.

Yet, our progress coexists with stubborn structural challenges, which remind us that transformation is not an event, but a concerted process. These challenges do not negate our gains; rather, they illuminate the unfinished business of our democratic advance.

It is precisely these challenges that must serve as a catalyst for renewal. They must provoke in us a higher degree of ethical leadership, administrative capability and ideological clarity.

They demand that we recommit ourselves to the politics of service anchored in integrity, humility, accountability, and a steadfast fidelity to the collective aspirations of our people.

We appreciate that the path ahead will be characterised by complexity, uneven development and moments of profound strain. However, history confirms that societies advance not by surrendering to difficulty, but by cultivating a strategic vision rooted in hope, and disciplined action.

The task of the provincial government is not merely to administer budgets. It is to shape destiny, and we are engaged in the quiet work of

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building. History does not reward noise. It rewards perseverance and discipline.

We are mindful of the burdens we carry, confident in the mandate we hold and resolute in our determination that the Free State, under the leadership of the African National Congress, is a province that works.

### **Honourable Speaker**

Let me acknowledge the leadership of the former **SAPS Provincial Commissioner, Lt. General Baile Motswenyane**, whose term ended in **January** this year. Her tenure has changed the landscape of policing in the **Free State**. She was our leader, our protector and our sister in the struggle for a safer society. We wish her well in her future endeavours!

Let me equally place on record my appreciation for the **Honourable Members of this House**. The men and women whose deliberations and oversight continue to give life to our constitutional democracy.

My appreciation goes out to my political home the **ANC**, the **ANC Women's League**, not forgetting the **Youth League** and **Alliance partners** for their continued support.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank our **organised labour** for always being available to give constructive advice.

I also wish to extend my profound gratitude to my **family** for their understanding and unwavering support, as I navigate this journey of public service.

Let us take a moment to introspect, to believe in the horizon that awaits us, and then, with renewed purpose, let us climb the next hill, together.

**Ke Ya Leboha**



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**Baie Dankie**  
**I Thank You!**

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