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INTERVENTION

## Legal fraternity rolls up sleeves to help ailing Master's Office

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THE Law Society of SA (LSSA) has noted the importance of a short-term intervention to tackle the litany of problems at the beleaguered Master's Offices throughout the country.

"We want South Africa to work. We want to make it work for the vulnerable and the citizens of South Africa," LSSA's national chairperson of deceased estates committee Hussan Goga said.

"We want to assist not only regarding the administration of estates, but it is our duty as citizens of this country to help. We make a plea that we are prepared to assist."

He made the statement as LSSA presented a 10-point short-term plan to address the challenges that have faced the Master's Office over the years.

"What the department can do is to deliver tangible results by these interventions. At all Master's Offices it is necessary for them to use emails as a channel of communication.

"This should be an immediate instruction to every Master's Office in the country. It will improve channels of communication significantly."

Goga also said the turnaround

times for issuing letters of authorisation for executors and examination of accounts should be reduced from 21 days to 14 days and for the Guardian Fund from 40 days to 30.

"This will ensure that productivity is increased in Master's Offices and the output is increased. This will make a significant difference to service."

The annual performance plan statistics should be published monthly on the Master's Office website, he said. "This will assist LSSA to measure the performance of Master's Offices throughout the country. This would be a very good intervention so that the performance of Master's Offices can be measured by stakeholders."

Goga said the Master's Offices should strictly comply with directives with regard to SMS notification and SMS links when letters of authority and executorship were issued.

"There is a disjuncture in the date when a letter of authority or executorship is issued and when the notification is actually received."

Goga said any outstanding requirement delaying the issuing of letters of appointment and executorship should be communicated within seven days.

"The Master's Office can't use the

Post Office, which takes three months to reach a practitioner or a member of the public."

The Department of Justice and its Home Affairs counterpart should engage over delays caused by incorrect marital status on death certificate, he said.

"It stakes six or nine months. It is a time-consuming process, as a result administration of estates is significantly delayed."

LSSA also wants to be consulted when the Master's Office develops directives and said that there should be strict implementation of file management immediately.

"The major problem is that files are not located, files are lost and files have to be reconstructed. If greater care and circumspection can take place with file management it can go a long way in assisting service delivery," Goga added.

The department and Master's Office should develop a framework for candidate attorneys to clear backlogs as part of pro bono community work he said.

Acting chief Master Penelope Roberts said they welcomed the engagement from the legal fraternity. Roberts undertook to attend to the issues raised and engage when directives are issued so the legal fraternity could have a say.

