

To: The Honorable Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane
Premier, Eastern Cape Province
%: tandile.mtiki@ecotp.gov.za

28 September 2023

Re: Removal of Dr Rolene Wagner

Dear Premier Mabuyane

We, the undersigned, are dismayed and deeply concerned by media reports that the HOD of the Eastern Cape Department of Health, Dr Rolene Wagner, has been removed from her position.

Dr Wagner is known and respected in the Public Health community for her leadership of health systems strengthening and turn-around strategies in the health sector, particularly in the Eastern Cape, which have earned her and her team numerous accolades and awards.

According to reports in the Daily Dispatch of 21 September, at the centre of the allegation of under-performance lies the department's failure "to fill more than 1,000 critical vacant posts, including those of nine CEOs". The inability to fill these posts, however, links to funding limitations that have made appointments impossible. These vacancies pale in light of the fact that, as recently reported at the Rural Health Conference, over 13,500 healthcare workers were appointed in 2022, placing them at rural facilities and other priority sites. Furthermore, between April and July 2023 alone, it has been reported recently, over nine thousand appointments were made, of which 1,390 are said to be permanent employees, and 7,647 contract appointments. These figures illustrate the magnitude of the task Dr Wagner and her team have had to address since her appointment in August 2021, at the height of the COVID pandemic.

Other departmental achievements under her leadership, to name just a few, include the widely reported successful court battle that curtailed the haemorrhage of funds lost to medico legal settlements (an estimated total of around R1,5 billion further loss has thereby been averted), the roll-out of a digital health record system to 26 hospitals and 3 EMS units, which saves the department around R45 million annually; and the elimination of unauthorised expenditure of the budget Vote and the reduction of irregular expenditure from around R200 million in 2020/21 to under R6,7m at the end of 2022/23.

The Daily Dispatch article quotes Nehawu provincial secretary Mlungiseleli Ncapayi as saying, "It has long been our conclusion that [Wagner] has no capacity to resolve all the complexities of the provincial health system." We contend that it is indeed impossible for one person to "resolve all the complexities" of the Eastern Cape health system, accumulated over decades, in just two years, but that the turn-around already evident under her leadership is indeed remarkable, and deserves and requires sustained support and commitment by all role players. As the secretary of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA) in the province, Veli Sinqana, is quoted as saying in a Spotlight article (5 May 2023), "addressing the issues of the public health sector is a process, not an event".

Furthermore, in the face of imminent budget cuts and drastic austerity measures, as signalled by Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana, health departments and their staff across the country urgently require stability and certainty of leadership. Destabilising Eastern Cape health leadership,

which has achieved remarkable successes in a relatively short period of time, will endanger these and future achievements, as well as severely undermine staff morale, and will directly contribute to deteriorating levels of service delivery.

We therefore ask you to reinstate Dr Wagner in her post as HOD, and provide her with the necessary support to continue implementation of the EC Department of Health's turn-around strategy. If you do feel that there is sufficient cause for concern about underperformance or maladministration to warrant her removal at this crucial point in time, we urge that this be preceded by a thorough and transparent review, including what steps have been taken to raise and remedy these in the past.

Signed:

1. Prof Uta Lehmann, Director, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape
2. Prof Helen Schneider, DSI/NRF South African Research Chair in Health Systems Governance, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape
3. Prof René English, Division of Health Systems and Public Health, Stellenbosch University
4. Prof Susan Cleary, Head and Director: School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
5. Prof Beth Engelbrecht, UCT School of Public Health and emeritus HOD Western Cape Health
6. Dr Harsha Somaroo, President- Public Health Association of South Africa
7. Prof Sharon Fonn University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and University of Gothenburg Sweden
8. Prof Yogan Pillay, Division of Public Health and Health Systems, Stellenbosch University
9. Dr Tim Wilson
10. Sheila Barsel
11. Prof Tanya Doherty, Extra-ordinary Professor, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape and Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council
12. Dr Fareed Abdullah, Director: Office of AIDS and TB Research, South African Medical Research Council
13. A/Prof Tracey Naledi, School of Public Health, UCT
14. Dr Nonhlanhla Nxumalo, Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand
15. Dr Prudence Ditlopo, Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand
16. Prof Haroon Saloojee, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand
17. Dr Shanil Haricharan, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, University of Cape Town
18. Prof Lucy Gilson, Head, Health Policy and Systems Division, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
19. Dr Wanga Zembe-Mkabile, Senior Specialist Scientist, Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council
20. Prof Mashudu Nethononda, Division of Cardiology, Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital and the University of the Witwatersrand.
21. Dr Vinayak Bhardwaj, School of Public Health, University of Witwatersrand
22. Dr Hanneljie Ferreira, Drug Resistant TB Unit, Klerksdorp/Tshepong Hospital Complex, North West Province
23. Dr Thami Mngoma. Lake Smit and Partners. Durban
24. Prof Mary-Ann Davies, Director: Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Research, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
25. Prof Andrew Boule, Public Health Specialist, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town

26. Wendy Wiemers, Project Manager: Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Research, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
27. Dr Kerrin Begg, Public Health Medicine Specialist, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
28. Dr Nisha Jacob, Public Health Medicine Specialist, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
29. Prof Virginia Zweigenthal, Public Health Medicine Specialist, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
30. Dr Mohammed Ishaq Datay, Specialist Physician and Senior Lecturer Health Promotion, Primary Health Care Directorate, Department of Family, Community and Emergency care, University of Cape Town
31. Karessa Govender, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape
32. Dr Martina Lembani, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape.
33. Prof Hassan Mahomed, Division of Health Systems and Public Health, Stellenbosch University
34. Dr Ziefred McConney, Clinical Manager Dora Nginza Hospital Gqberha, Medicolegal Western Region ECDOH
35. Dr Jodi Wishnia, CEO Zazen Respite Care
36. Dr Morna Cornell, Senior Researcher, UCT School of Public Health
37. Sarah Davids, School of Public Health, University of Western Cape
38. Dr Charmaine Cunningham, Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Cape Town
39. Dr Colin Pfaff
40. Dr John Michell
41. Dr Ben Gaunt, Clinical manager (medicolegal), ECDOH
42. Dr Tanya Jacobs
43. Barbara Green-Thompson
44. Dr Shuaib Manjra, UCT
45. Prof Susan Goldstein Wits University, School of Public Health
46. Dr Nicholas Fine
47. Dr Philippa Scotcher, Acting Clinical Manager, Bhisho Hospital
48. Ms Nikki Schaay, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape
49. Dr Tom Boyles, University of the Witwatersrand
50. Dr Kim Jonas, Specialist Scientist, Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council
51. A/Prof Peter Hodgkinson, Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Cape Town
52. Prof Elizabeth M Webb. Epidemiologist. School of Health Systems and Public Health, University of Pretoria
53. Prof Elma de Vries, School of Medicine, Nelson Mandela University
54. Prof Edina Sinanovic, Head of the Health Economics Division, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
55. Dr Sinola Rajaram Joint Appointment CMJAH UNIVERSITY WITWATERSRAND
56. Wesley Craig, Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Cape Town
57. Dr Juliet Nyasulu, Division of Health Systems and Public Health, Stellenbosch University
58. Prof Andrew KL Robinson, North West University (NWU), and Physicians Association for Nutrition -South Africa (PAN-SouthAfrica)
59. Dr Annibale Cois, Senior Researcher, Division of Health Systems & public Health, Stellenbosch University
60. Prof Steve Reid, Chair of Primary Health Care and Head of Department of Family, Community and Emergency Care, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town

61. Dr Astrid Turner, School of Health Systems and Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria
62. Prof Lucille Blumberg University of Stellenbosch
63. Penny Parenzee
64. Dr Gareth Kantor, Department of Anaesthesiology, University of Cape Town
65. Dr Geetesh Solanki, Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council. Honorary Research Associate: Health Economic Unit, University of Cape Town
66. Prof Leslie London, Chair of Public Health Medicine, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
67. Dr Shrikant Peters, Public Health Medicine Specialist, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
68. Dr Saiendhra Moodley, College of Public Health Medicine & School of Health Systems and Public Health, University of Pretoria.
69. Prof Mary Edginton, Prof of Public Health (retired), School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand
70. Darlene de Vos, Chief Director District Management, Nelson Mandela Metro
71. Dr Elizabeth du Toit , School of Medicine, Nelson Mandela University
72. Prof Peter Barron, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand
73. Farzaneh Behroozi, Public Health Researcher
74. Prof Pat Mayers, School of Nursing, University of the Western Cape
75. Dr. Krish Vallabhjee (personal capacity)
76. Dr Sian Geraty, Livingstone Hospital Emergency Department
77. Dr Yowayne Phillips-NMU School of Medicine
78. Dr Yoshna Kooverjee, School of Medicine, Nelson Mandela University
79. Dr Sean Volkwyn, School of Medicine, Nelson Mandela University
80. Prof HJ Hodgkinson, School of Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand.
81. Dr Aslam Dasoo, Progressive Health Forum
82. Dr Tumelo Assegaai, Health Policy and Systems Division, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
83. Dr Katya Evans, Specialist Emergency Physician
84. Dr Jithan Koshy, Specialist Cardiothoracic Surgeon
85. Fahiem Titus, Health Policy and Systems Division, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
86. Prof Jane Goudge, Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand
87. Dr Kate Rees, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand
88. Louis van Rensburg, Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Cape Town
89. Dr Rebecca Gray, RCWMCH Anaesthesia, Division of Global Surgery University of Cape Town
90. Dr Emma Cora Gardiner, Head of Clinical Unit, Internal Medicine & Rheumatology, Livingstone Hospital, Gqeberha
91. Prof Teresa Lorenzo, Disability Studies, University of Cape Town
92. Dr Bridget Farham, Editor, South African Medical Journal
93. Prof Lydia Cairncross, Department of Surgery, University of Cape Town
94. Prof Alex van den Heever, Wits School of Governance
95. Dr David Pienaar, public health specialist, Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness
96. Dr Tony Hawkrige, Public Health Medicine Specialist, Western Cape Province, personal capacity.
97. Dr Andrea Mendelsohn

98. Prof Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven, Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care, School of Clinical Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand
99. Dr Maggie de Swardt, Division of Interdisciplinary Palliative Care and Medicine, University of Cape Town
100. Dr Jannes Moolman, Clinical Manager, Uitenhage Provincial Hospital, ECDOH
101. Dr Taryn Gaunt, GP Port Alfred
102. Dr Graeme Hofmeyr, Clinical Manager, Isilimela Hospital
103. Andrew Donaldson, Senior Research Associate, SALDRU, University of Cape Town
104. A/Prof Clint Hendrikse, Division of Emergency Medicine, University of Cape Town
105. A/Prof Olagoke Akintola, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town.
106. Dr Eleanor Beth Whyte, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
107. Dr Therese Fish, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Stellenbosch University
108. Prof James McIntyre, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town
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112. A/Prof Simone Honikman, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town
113. A/Prof Amnesty LeFevre, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town
114. Lori Lake, Children's Institute, UCT
115. A/Prof Neil McKerrow, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town
116. Tlameo M Mothudi, Independent Contractor and Global Atlantic Fellow in Health Equity
117. Dr Harsha Somaroo, President- Public Health Association of South Africa
118. A/Prof Maylene Shung King, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town
119. Sagie Pillay School of Medicine, Wits University
120. Dr Reno Morar, School of Medicine,
121. Prof Mignon McCulloch, Head of Clinical Unit, Paediatric Nephrology, University of Cape Town
122. Dr Jaline Kotze, Senior Manager Medical Services, ECDOH
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126. Dr Natasha R Rhoda, Head of Clinical Unit, Neonatal Medicine, University of Cape Town
127. Dr Vuyiswa Kumalo, School of Public Health, Wits University
128. Dr Woldekidan Amde, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape
129. Dr Wendy Vogel