

INTERVIEW WITH SAMANTHA BRENER, ATTORNEY SECTION 27, 30 NOVEMBER 2020.

Progress made to address the infrastructure backlogs in schools that were created during apartheid, so that all schools across the country have the safe basic infrastructure needed for effective learning, has been very slow. As a consequence, school infrastructure was very unprepared, in many areas, to deal with the demands of a pandemic such as Covid19 when it hit. Records from presentations of the Department of Basic Education to the Standing Committee on Appropriations in Parliament on 22 July 2020 show that DBE, in order to fill this gap, hired water tanks for 1,428 schools without running water around the country. DBE also hired mobile toilets for 3,157 schools with pit toilets or inadequate toilet infrastructure in Limpopo and Eastern Cape. DBE spent R600million for these water tanks and mobile toilets, which were rented for only 3 months - for the duration of the hard lock down 'emergency'. These are temporary solutions to historical problems, which need to be addressed sustainably and permanently.

Had school water and sanitation infrastructure been in a state which meets school infrastructure regulations, this spending would not have been necessary.

It must also be noted that there have been large reductions to the education conditional grants (most notably to the Education Infrastructure Grant) tasked with solving infrastructure backlogs in the schooling system. Because of the cuts, the DBE announced to the Standing Committee on Appropriations in Parliament that 1,938 school infrastructure projects have been suspended or delayed. In other words, these temporary interventions have come at the expense of long-term, permanent improvements to school infrastructure.