

Esidimeni families still want justice!

By **LETHABO KHAMBULE**

FIVE years later, it still remains unclear whether there will be criminal prosecutions over the Life Esidimeni tragedy.

On Thursday 15 July, NGO Section27 held a virtual briefing on the judicial inquest into the deaths of Life Esidimeni patients.

The briefing was hosted in partnership with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group and the Life Esidimeni Family Committee. It was expected to continue on Monday, 19 July.

Section27 executive director, Umunyana Rugege said it was difficult to know if there would be any criminal prosecutions against government officials or NGOs involved.

“We are not in a place to say there will be criminal prosecution, but we know the NPA has been working on this for long and we have also been co-operating with them,” she said.

“The Life Esidimeni Inquest will only be investigating the cause of death, which means the families of survivors will not take part of the inquest,” said Rugege.

She said she didn’t have a list of witnesses and was not certain former Gauteng health MEC Qedani Mahlangu would participate.

At the Life Esidimeni arbitration hearings, chaired by retired deputy chief justice Dikgang Moseneke, it emerged that Mahlangu gave the go-ahead for mentally ill patients to be moved to various NGOs after the department terminated its contract with the Life Esidimeni Group. The hearings found there was unconstitutional conduct and ordered that affected families be compensated. The inquest is expected to give answers on who was responsible for the death of 144 patients.

Once the inquest is completed, the NPA will take the findings and decide whether there was any criminal conduct. Christine Nxumalo of the family committee said: “To not have anyone account will make it seem like those responsible have got away with murder.”