DNA database would protect citizens against re-offenders

FEW events could highlight the significance and severity of parliament’s failure to pass DNA database legislation than the impending release of 35,000 prisoners due to overcrowding.

If the government had performed its duty years ago, when the necessary technical capacity for such a database was developed in South Africa, the release of the 35,000 inmates could have been accompanied by the most effective mechanism known to identify those criminals who commit new offences.

Instead, because of the government’s failure to ensure DNA profiles from convicted offenders, the criminals have been released with little opportunity to protect the public when they do that which is most likely, namely re-offend.

DNA databases legislated in more than 40 countries worldwide are the most effective crime-fighting tools available to law enforcement. They have proven to not only identify the most heinous criminals, but also serve to exonerate those wrongly arrested and convicted.

In the US alone, DNA has exonerated more than 200 wrongly convicted people. When individuals are convicted and sent to jail, their DNA profile (not their actual DNA, but a digitized representation of their DNA) is put into a database that can be searched when other crimes are committed.

When these individuals are released, if they commit crimes again, they can be caught quickly and more reliably than ever before.

South Africa is about to be hit with a wave of newly released criminals.

Statistically, given what research tells us about the rate at which criminals reoffend, thousands of people will commit new crimes.

Because of the government’s failure to act, South Africa will be unprotected by the best technology available.

South Africans have just been given 30,000 more reasons to ask government to finally pass the DNA database legislation and make them safer. — Mogau Mabapa, Tshwane

It is black children whose futures are chained to ineptitude.