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Handbook on Complaints and Suggestions:

Policies and Procedures

Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC)



Endorsed by the Board of Directors in March, 2021.

Signature of the Chairman of the Board of Directors



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## **Introduction**

This Handbook, titled " Complaints and Suggestions; Policies and Procedures", was issued by the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC), as endorsed by its Board of Directors in March 2021 following its thorough review.

The Handbook comes as a practical extension of JLAC's effort to ensure the access of Palestinian victims of human rights offenses, particularly those from among the more vulnerable groups, to due process irrespective of the perpetrating body. And was developed in alignment with the Center's values, work ethics, principle of confidentiality and privacy, as well as its adherence to international laws, customs and conventions on human rights and rights to a decent living. Moreover, the Handbook reaffirms the right to raise grievances, as enshrined in international conventions and national legislations, and hence a significant domestic mechanism in the protection of human rights on the local level.

In keeping with the above, an updated system covering JLAC's policies and procedures in raising complaints and suggestions has been codified. The updated system covers the registration and handling of all complaints, as raised by the JLAC's beneficiaries and representatives (including employees and/or administrators) across all serviced areas in; matters pertaining to bias, assault, harassment, suspicion of corruption and/or negligence involving JLAC beneficiaries and/or representatives. This Handbook promotes the principle that everyone is accountable. All of the JLAC staff members are personally accountable, in front of the Board of Directors, for adhering to and implementing this system (in the case a complaint is raised through them). Therefore, the entirety of JLAC's working team must review and understand the Handbook. Lastly, this confidentiality of complaints is safeguarded this system.

Note: This Handbook does not address any internal workplace issue, which may include salary scales, employees' work performance review, working conditions, duties, responsibilities, etc. Such are dealt by JLAC's administrative policies and procedures, unless it constitutes discrimination or suspicion of extortion.

## **Main Objective**

This Handbook seeks to address the complaints and suggestions submitted by JLAC's beneficiaries and/or representatives, towards resolving the problems with fairness and transparency and ensuring a safe environment for all. It also aims to facilitate the process of taking into account the suggestions and ideas of beneficiaries and representative in the development process. Moreover, the Handbook reinforces the commitment of JLAC to follow up on cases and mitigate negligence and dereliction of duty.

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## Specific Objectives

- To promote acculture of accountability, as well as written complaints and suggestions among JLAC's beneficiaries and representatives.
- To explain the procedures to be followed in submitting complaints and suggestions.
- To explain the mechanisms to be followed when handling complaints submitted by JLAC's beneficiaries and representatives in matters pertaining to bias, assault, harassment, suspicion of corruption and/or negligence (involving JLAC beneficiaries and/or representatives).
- To explain the mechanisms to be followed when processing and following up received complaints and suggestions.
- To facilitate beneficiaries' communication with JLAC's management towards improving the Center's performance.

## Definitions

**Complaint:** Any claim raised by a JLAC beneficiary and /or a JLAC representative, regarding any violation to his/her rights, as vested in international human rights standards, national legislation, and/or JLAC's policies.

**Suggestion:** Any idea that feeds into the development and improvement of any aspect of JLAC's operations, whether in regards to its programs, management and/or finance.

**Valid Complaint:** A claim submitted by an individual through the designated form and accepted by the Complaints Committee.

**Dropped Complaint:** A claim that was accepted by the Complaints Committee, and later was found to be false or erroneous.

**Complainer:** A person, whose rights were violated by JLAC or during the provision of a service provided to him/her, by one of the JLAC's representatives, and whose complaint was accepted by the Complaints Committee.

**Complainee:** A JLAC representative (or beneficiary) whom violated the rights of JLAC's beneficiaries or representatives.

**Complaints Committee (or the Committee):** JLAC's Monitoring and Auditing Committee is the designated committee for handling complaints. If necessary, the Committee can resort to external parties when seeking particular expertise in different matters while conducting inquiry and investigation.

**Work-related Complaints:** Complaints related to the quality, as well as the implementation and execution, of the JLAC's programs and services.

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**Sensitive complaints:** Complaints filed against the violations to JLAC’s code of conduct and the values and principles it enshrines, as a result of poor behavior on the part of the Center’s representatives. Such includes abuse, disrespect and discrimination, in addition to any form of verbal and physical harassment and discrimination based on gender, religion, disability, etc., as well as any suspicion of corruption or fraud. These violations can occur during recruitment, service provision, or in failing to provide equal opportunity recruitment/procurement.

### **Concerned Parties**

This Handbook applies to all JLAC representatives (i.e. General Assembly, Board of Directors, staff members, trainees/interns, consultants, service providers, volunteers, etc.) and beneficiaries of the services provided through the Center.

### **Administering the Handbook and its Content**

JLAC’s management shall ensure that a copy of this Handbook is provided to all of the Center’s current employees, whom will sign a statement confirming his /her receipt and understanding of its content. The Handbook will also be provided to and signed by any new employee or trainee.

### **Reviews and Amendments**

JLAC’s management is obligated to regularly consult beneficiaries and stakeholders towards inclusive annual development, reinforcement and review of this system. Amendments to this Handbook are tasked to the Complaints Committee, in the following cases:

1. As needed, especially in addressing un tackled issues.
2. In the event there is a major shift in JLAC’s work environment or the execution of its programming.
3. In the event a need or a request is voiced by a member of the Board of Directors and /or JLAC’s internal management.

*Note: Any amendments will be subject to the same endorsement process which the Handbook was initially subject to.*

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## **Valid Complaints and Cases**

### **Valid complaints as raised by beneficiaries include:**

- Needed service not provided as expected and in accordance with work ethics.
- Lack of responsiveness in required service provision, negligence, and long waits/delay in the follow-up process.
- Service not provided as customary or beneficiary unable to obtain specified service.
- Provided service is below the standards.
- General mistreatment.
- Failure to communicate clearly the followed procedures when opening a new case file.
- Providing misinformation or misdirection.
- Infringing on beneficiaries' privacy/ information.
- Violating beneficiary privacy, physically and/or verbal harassment.
- Abuse of the power entrusted to the employee handling the case against the Complainee.
- Demanding a fee in exchange for free service provision.

### **Valid complaints as raised by JLAC employees:**

- Discrimination made against the employee by their line manager or JLAC's management.
- Exploitation by a colleague.
- Violation to the employee's rights as vested in the code of conduct.
- Violation to their dignity by a colleague or line manager.
- Misuse of power.
- Behavior considered to be corrupt, suspicion of corruption, or attempting to force an employee to cover up corruption.
- Witnessing a colleague misusing authority or clearly violate JLAC's bylaws.

### **Different types of complaints addressed by the Handbook:**

- Complaints related to the poor implementation of the JLAC's programs and services.
- Complaints related to the poor application of the JLAC's values and principles, including the conduct of the JLAC's employees and any suspicion of corruption or fraud.
- Any staff's behavior that violates JLAC's code of conduct, or considered to be inappropriate, abusive, and/or disrespectful, or a form of harassment and discrimination.

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- Corruption: Abuse of the power entrusted to employees for private gain or others' gain, including bribery, conflicts of interest, favoritism and fraud.

### **Mechanism for filing and handling suggestions and complaints**

Suggestions and complaints can be submitted to JLAC through one of the below methods:

-Written suggestions and complaints can be submitted to the following e-mail address, [complaints@jlac.ps](mailto:complaints@jlac.ps), which is designated for receiving complaints. Once the complaint is received, it will be automatically directed to the Suggestions and Complaints Committee, which in turn sends an email receipt confirmation with an estimated date to respond to the one filing the complaint.

-Complaints cannot be filed over the phone. However, complainers can contact JLAC's General Director by phone to inquire of the steps and procedures requires to file a complaint. JLAC can be reached through the following phone number: 022987981.

- Complaints can be submitted in person at one of JLAC's offices. This can be done through requesting the designated complaints form from one of the employees at the office, to write down the complaint and place it in the Suggestions and Complaints Box. Employees are not allowed to dictate the complaint's content or make suggestions about its content or writing style.

In case the complainer contacts JLAC by phone, or shows up in person to one of the JLAC's offices, and speaks to one of the employees, the employee will inquire whether the complainer would like to make an official complaint. If he/she desires to, the employee will guide the complainer in registering the complaint.

In case the complainer is incapable of writing, the employee will help him/her in filling out the complaint form. Afterwards, the employee will recite accurately the content of the complaint to the complainer without any changes, additions, and/or omissions. Once the content of the complaint is confirmed by the complainer, he/she will be asked to sign the form. Then the employee will write down the date of complaint's submission, and place it in the Suggestions and Complaints Box, or send it to the aforementioned email as a scanned copy.

**Note: It is preferable to submit complaints through the email address, stating the ID of the complainer and their contact information towards facilitating communication with the them, or with those who submit suggestions.**

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## **Mechanism for handling complaints by the Complaints Committee**

Within a week of the complaint's receipt via the email, the Complaint Committee will examine the nature of the complaint (whether work-related or sensitive), and verify its grounds and validity. Anonymous complaints will not be considered by the Committee. On the other hand, the complainant will be protected, unless malicious motives were present.

## **Suggestions and Complaints Box**

- A suggestion and complains box will be placed in every JLAC office (without exception) in a visible area. The phrase "Suggestions and Complaints Box" will be clearly posted on the Box.
- The Complaints Committee will be responsible for keeping copies of the boxes' keys.
- The Complaints Committee will delegate one of the employees at each office to be granted access to the box as to collect the complaints. The employee will be delegated through a written authorization, to be renewed every six months.
- The data of each complaint form will be logged in the attached " Annex 1". Moreover, all suggestions and complaints forms and documents shall be handed to the Complaints Committee.
- In case there were no complaints or suggestions, it will be logged as such in Annex 1.
- The complaints committee shall choose a date to examine the forms, within two weeks of opening the complaints box and collecting the complaints and suggestions forms (if any).



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## **Procedures for handling suggestions and complaints**

- After collecting the forms, whether through email or the box, a serial number will be assigned to each complaint and suggestion form by the committee. In addition, they will be sorted by suggestion, regular complaint or sensitive complaint.

### **Suggestions**

In the event a suggestion is submitted, it will be initially examined by the Committee, then feedback will be requested from the administrative staff at JLAC. Afterwards, it will be submitted to the concerned party. If the suggestion is found to be applicable and endorsed, the submitter will be notified. Whether the suggestion is endorsed, the submitter will still receive an appreciation letter from JLAC.

### **Work-related complaints**

- All of the details of the complaint along with its serial number should be documented in the complaints log. In addition, any document attached with the complaint should be given the same serial number of the complaint.
- The Committee shall examine the complaint in order to identify the concerned parties, the required time period to provide a response, and the start of the investigation process.
- A copy of the complaint will be sent to the concerned parties. In case the complaint involves more than one person, each person will receive the part of the complaint that concerns him/her.
- The Committee should follow up the response of the complainer within a specified time period.
- When the concerned parties provide a response to the Complainee and it's verified, a response should be provided duly to the Complainer.
- The Committee is entitled to resort to any additional document or neutral sources during the investigation.

### **Sensitive Complaints**

The same procedures of work-related complaints shall be applied to sensitive complaints, taking into consideration the following:

- Strict confidentiality.



- If the complainer is concerned with one of the Complaints Committee members, then the case will be handed over to the Chairman of the Board of Directors. The Complaints Committee Shall hold a meeting to review the complaint, additional external or technical persons may also be included if the case warrants such.

**Important notes:**

- In case the Complainee refers to a member of the Suggestions and Complaints Committee, the concerned member will be excluded from the committee when examining the complaint about him/her.
- Anonymous complaints will not be disregarded; they will be given a serial number and documented in a special record, in order to make use of their content.
- Complaints will be handled in a serious, transparent and objective manner. Moreover, filing a complaint should not impact the relation with the Complainee.

**Allocated time to respond to the complaint:**

- In case the complaint is submitted via email, a response will be sent within a week from the date of the complaint submission.
- In case the complaint is filed through the Complaint Box, a response will be sent within one month to six weeks from the date of the complaint submission.

**Dropped complaints:**

Complaint will be dropped by the committee in the following cases:

- More than three months have passed since the complainer recognized the violation (unless the violation is still ongoing).
- The subject of the complaint is under consideration by a judicial body, or has been deliberated and received a court ruling.
- A complaint was filed to JLAC, and was rejected due to the emergence of new evidence.
- Administrative decisions with an expired objection period. This applies to every administrative decision made by the Board of Directors and the internal management, in which employees were briefed and a certain time period has passed. For example, if an employee raises an objection to an administrative or staff manual (such as this handbook), after it has been shared with employees and received their endorsement without objection.

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- The Complaints Committee deems the complaint to be malicious or irrational.
  - The complainer showed inadequate attention to his/her complaint, and did not provide evidence nor supporting documents, requested by JLAC, within a certain period. The lack of providing evidence that was requested of the complainant is considered inadequate attention.
  - The complainer desires to drop the complaint and suspends the investigation into his/her case.
  - A staff member files a complaint on behalf of his/her colleague (a proxy complaint). In this case, the committee will send an official letter to the person concerned to inquire about his/her interest in submitting a complaint. In the event of unwillingness, the complaint will be dropped.

### **Closing a complaint:**

- At the end of the investigation, the Committee shall hold a meeting to discuss the complaint and any other related issues, to agree upon an appropriate response and any other measures to be taken.
- Upon concluding the investigation and findings, the Complaints Committee will send an official letter to the complainer to inform him/her with the results of the investigation, the investigative measures taken in handling the complaint, the punitive measures that will be taken and implemented, if any, and the appeal mechanism in the event the complainer is not satisfied with the results of the investigation.
- An employee shall be designated by the Committee to follow up with the implementation of determined recommendations and measures.
- The rationale and reasons behind closing a complaint should be clarified.

### **Complaints filing**

Complaints will be saved in a special file on the server, with a password. This file will be accessible only to the Complaints Committee.

Strict confidentiality at this stage is crucial to maintain the privacy of the complainer. The information provided by the complainer, the content of the complaint and any relevant element are considered highly confidential.

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JLAC will keep, for five years, all received complaints, relevant reports by the employees following up the cases, the findings of every relevant meeting, in addition to all responses and letters of appeals, if any.

### **Assessment of the complains and suggestions system**

1- The Complaints Committee shall submit an annual report on the system, either as part of the annual administrative report or a separate report. It should summarize the received suggestions and complaints, sorted in accordance to their classification (i.e. suggestions, work-related complaints, or sensitive complaints), in addition to the committee findings, measures taken, and appeals.

2- The privacy and confidentiality of the complainants' information should be maintained, through withholding their identity in the reports on the system.

3- In regard to sensitive complaints, the Complaints Committee will determine the information to be published in the reports, taking into consideration the confidentiality of the complainant's personal information and preferences.

The complaints form is annexed to the Handbook. Moreover, updates to the form should coincide with amendments to the Handbook.

Reports: The Committee should submit an annual separate report on the received and handled complaints to the Board of Directors, due to its specificity.

### **Miscellaneous:**

The Complaints Committee shall take into consideration the following points when handling a complaint:

- The beneficiary/complainer should feel safe to submit his/her suggestion or complaint.
- To be patient and listen attentively to the complainer.
- To ensure the validity of the information provided by the complainer.
- To recite the content of the complaint to the complainer before submission.
- To be transparent through communicating the complaints' procedures and investigation process.
- To not ignore the problem.
- To respond quickly.
- To not be defensive when receiving the complaint.
- To avoid quarrels with the complainer when receiving a complaint.
- To not disrespect or dismiss the complainer.
- To not blame others when receiving the complaint.



- To not infer scenarios without verifying their grounds.
- To not give the complainer unattainable promises.

**Attachment:**

- Form for Logging Suggestions and Complaints Collected from Designated Boxes
- Suggestion/ Complaints Form

**Annex 1:**

Form for Logging Suggestions and Complaints Collected from Designated Boxes

Branch Office.....

Date of Collection		Number of Suggestions/ Complaints	Subject of Suggestions/ Complaints	Supervisor Opening Suggestions/ Complaints	Supervisor's Signature
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					



**Annex 2:**

Suggestion/ Complaints Form

Name:.....

Address:.....

Date of suggestion/ complaints submission:.....

Phone number:.....

In which JLAC office was the complaint was received: Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Salfeet

Subject:.....

Description:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Signature of the Complainer

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