



Employee Complaint Intake + Triage Decision Tree

Capture every complaint the same way, screen it for legal and safety risk, and route it to the right owner — within one business day.

WHAT THIS HELPS YOU DO

Use this tool the moment a complaint arrives — formal or hallway — to record it accurately, screen for protected categories and safety risk, decide whether investigation is required, and assign an owner with a deadline.

WHEN TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

- The moment any employee complaint is received, in any form
- When a supervisor mentions an employee 'vented' about something
- When a complaint arrives anonymously or through a third party
- When an exiting employee raises concerns in an exit interview
- Before deciding a complaint is 'not a big deal'

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT HELPS PREVENT

- Complaints that disappear into a supervisor's drawer until they become charges
- Protected-category complaints treated as personality conflicts
- Safety risks left unaddressed while paperwork circulates
- Retaliation exposure from mishandled or ignored reports
- Inconsistent intake that makes the employer look indifferent in hindsight

Faulkner HR Solutions focuses on the system behind the people problem. This tool is designed to help employers slow down the decision, identify the risk, and create proof before the issue becomes a claim, complaint, turnover event, or credibility problem.

BEFORE YOU START: READINESS CHECKLIST

Gather the following before working through this document. Incomplete inputs are one of the most common reasons employer decisions fail under later scrutiny.

Have it	Input	Notes / location
☐	Employee name and role	



Have it	Input	Notes / location
☐	Date of incident, request, or separation	
☐	Supervisor involved	
☐	Policy or handbook section that applies	
☐	Prior documentation on file	
☐	Pay records, if applicable	
☐	Relevant emails, texts, notes, or complaints	
☐	Decision-maker name	
☐	Deadline, if applicable	



INTAKE AND TRIAGE DECISION TREE

Every complaint goes through the same four screens: type, urgency, protected category, and safety. The routing decision comes from the screens — not from how the supervisor feels about the complainant.

Step 1 — Intake Record

Date and time complaint received	
Received by (name and role)	
How received (in person, email, text, anonymous, third party)	
Complainant name (or 'anonymous')	
Person(s) complained about	
Complaint summary, in the complainant's own words	
What does the complainant want to happen?	

Step 2 — Complaint Type

Applies	Type	Notes
☐	Harassment, discrimination, or retaliation	
☐	Pay, hours, overtime, or classification	
☐	Safety, injury, or working conditions	
☐	Policy violation by a coworker or supervisor	
☐	Interpersonal conflict / management style	
☐	Theft, fraud, or ethics concern	
☐	Leave, accommodation, or medical issue	

Step 3 — Urgency Screen

If any item below is true, act today — interim measures come before process.

True?	Urgency trigger	Action taken / time
☐	Any threat of violence, weapon, or physical intimidation	
☐	Ongoing physical or sexual harassment	



True?	Urgency trigger	Action taken / time
☐	Immediate safety hazard to any person	
☐	The complainant fears retaliation from a specific person today	
☐	Evidence is at risk of destruction	
☐	A minor, customer, or member of the public is affected	

Step 4 — Protected Category Screen

Yes?	Screen question	Details
☐	Does the complaint reference race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information?	
☐	Does it reference protected leave (FMLA), wage rights, safety reporting, or workers' comp?	
☐	Does it allege retaliation for a previous complaint or report?	
☐	Could a reasonable person read the complaint as raising any of the above, even without legal labels?	

Step 5 — Routing Decision Tree

If...	Then...	Mark
Any urgency trigger is true	Take interim protective action TODAY, then continue triage	
Any protected category screen is yes	Formal investigation required — open an investigation plan; do not resolve informally	
Policy violation without protected category	Assign fact-finding to HR or a neutral manager; document findings	
Interpersonal conflict, no policy or protected issue	Route to management coaching / mediation; record the outcome	
Ethics, theft, or fraud	Route to owner/executive and consider outside review; preserve records	

Step 6 — Interim Actions Considered

Used	Interim option (protect the complainant without punishing them)	Details
☐	Schedule or reporting-line separation between the parties	
☐	Paid administrative leave for the accused, pending review	
☐	Reminder to all involved: no retaliation, no discussion with witnesses	
☐	Evidence preservation (emails, video, records) initiated	



Used	Interim option (protect the complainant without punishing them)	Details
☐	No interim action needed — reason documented	

Step 7 — Owner Assignment

Owner assigned (name and role)	
Next action and deadline	
Date complainant told what happens next	
Follow-up date to confirm no retaliation	

Role	Name / signature	Date
Intake completed by		
Triage reviewed by		

STOP AND REVIEW BEFORE ACTING

If any statement below is true, pause. Get the decision reviewed by HR, counsel, or Faulkner HR Solutions before you act.

- ☐ The employee recently complained about pay, harassment, discrimination, safety, leave, or retaliation.
- ☐ The supervisor has no prior documentation.
- ☐ The decision is inconsistent with how similar cases were handled.
- ☐ The employee is on, or recently requested, protected leave.
- ☐ The issue involves pay, deductions, final wages, medical information, disability, pregnancy, injury, or protected activity.
- ☐ The decision will be visible to a board, council, funder, auditor, plaintiff attorney, or agency.

MINIMUM DOCUMENTATION STANDARD

Before this file is closed, the employer should be able to answer every question below and point to where the proof lives.

Question	Your answer / where the proof is stored
What happened?	



Question	Your answer / where the proof is stored
When did it happen?	
Who observed or reported it?	
What policy, standard, deadline, or expectation applies?	
What decision was made?	
Who had authority to make the decision?	
What alternatives were considered?	
What risk was reviewed?	
What follow-up is required?	
Where is the proof stored?	

COMMON MISTAKES

1. Waiting for a 'formal' written complaint before treating it as a complaint.
2. Letting the accused's supervisor decide whether the complaint has merit.
3. Moving or punishing the complainant as the 'easy' interim fix.
4. Promising confidentiality you cannot keep instead of promising discretion.
5. Resolving a protected-category complaint over coffee and documenting nothing.
6. Closing intake without telling the complainant what happens next — silence reads as indifference.
7. Skipping the retaliation follow-up after the complaint is resolved.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

File the intake record, execute the routing decision, calendar the follow-up date, and confirm the complainant knows the next step. If the routing calls for investigation, open the Workplace Investigation Planning Template within one business day.

Before you terminate, deduct, discipline, classify, or respond, get the decision reviewed.

Call 210.446.8730 or email thomas@faulknerhrsolutions.info.



Before you process payroll, terminate, classify, deduct, or respond to a claim, get the decision reviewed.

Need help applying this to a real workplace decision?

Faulkner HR Solutions helps Texas employers, nonprofits, municipalities, and growing businesses fix the people systems behind recurring workplace problems.

If this document raised a risk flag, do not guess your way through the next step.

Call: 210.446.8730

Email: thomas@faulknerhrsolutions.info

Website: faulknerhrsolutions.info

DISCLAIMER

This resource is provided for general employer education and planning purposes. It is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Employment laws, agency guidance, and local requirements may change. Employers should review the facts of each situation before acting and consult appropriate HR or legal counsel when needed.