Protecting
And Promoting
Whistleblowing
In South Africa

Choose Courage.
Protect Courage.

A Practical Guide to Whistleblowing in South Africa.

Democracy Works Foundation
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IMPORTANT NOTICE AND DISCLAIMER

This Guide has been developed for public education, awareness, and advocacy. It supports broader understanding of whistleblowing in South Africa by discussing risk, available options, and possible sources of support.

It is not legal advice, legal representation, counselling, therapy, security advice, financial advice, or any other form of professional advice or service. It should not be relied on as a substitute for advice tailored to the facts and circumstances of a particular case.

Whistleblowing situations differ widely. The legal position may depend on the nature of the wrongdoing, the information involved, the route used to make the disclosure, the status of the person making it, the timing of events, the available evidence, and the response of the employer, institution, or authority concerned. Risks may also differ depending on employment status, income security, disability, family responsibilities, workplace hierarchy, health, location, and other personal or contextual factors.

Independent legal or other appropriate professional advice should therefore be sought as early as possible before steps are taken that may create legal, employment, financial, psychosocial, reputational, digital, or personal safety risks. This is especially important where there are concerns about dismissal, suspension, disciplinary action, confidentiality, harassment, intimidation, threats, evidence handling, criminal exposure, or media disclosure.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this Guide is accurate, fair, and current at the time of publication, the law, policy environment, institutional practice, and available support mechanisms may change. Individual outcomes may also differ significantly depending on the facts of each matter and the forum or process involved.

This Guide does not guarantee that any person will qualify as a whistleblower in law, that any disclosure will amount to a protected disclosure, that confidentiality or anonymity can be maintained, or that any institution or authority will respond in a particular way. Use of this Guide does not create any attorney-client, advisory, fiduciary, counselling, or other professional relationship with the Democracy Works Foundation, its authors, contributors, editors, or funders.

Nothing in this Guide should be understood as encouraging any person to act unlawfully, remove or disclose information unlawfully, ignore applicable legal duties, or proceed without considering the consequences carefully.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This Guide was developed by Democracy Works Foundation (DWF), as part of the Protecting and Promoting Whistleblowing in South Africa (PPW) project. The PPW project is a multi-year initiative led by Democracy Works Foundation (DWF), in partnership with The Whistleblower House (TWBH). The project combines support to whistleblowers and their families with research, dialogue, advocacy, and policy engagement aimed at strengthening South Africa's whistleblowing environment.

The Guide is intended primarily for people who may be considering whether to disclose wrongdoing, as well as those who have already spoken up and are trying to navigate what happens next. It is also relevant to employers, ethics officers, human resource practitioners, trade unions, journalists, civil society organisations, public institutions, and others who shape the environment in which whistleblowing takes place.

Whistleblowing is not only a legal issue. It is also a human experience shaped by risk, power, workplace culture, socio-economic conditions, institutional trust, and personal consequence. It is shaped by how institutions respond in practice, whether reporting channels are trusted, whether confidentiality is respected, whether support is available, and whether workplace culture punishes or protects those who speak up. [Accountability Paper]

This Guide brings together legal and policy understanding with practical lessons drawn from the broader PPW project, selected guidebooks, legal resources, public-interest materials, and the DWF report on *Understanding and Navigating Whistleblowing in the Workplace*. The references to the resources and directory of support are provided for ease of reference at the end of the Guide.

The Guide is practical, accessible, and complementary. It does not replace specialist legal texts, psychosocial resources, institutional policies, or the work of existing whistleblower support organisations. Its purpose is to help people understand the terrain, ask better questions, identify and reduce risk where possible, and locate useful support and referral pathways following research, advocacy and engagements with both practitioners and whistleblowers.

At the heart of this Guide is a simple belief that protecting whistleblowers is not only about responding after harm occurs. It is also about strengthening the conditions under which people can speak up more safely, more deliberately, and with greater support.

USING THIS GUIDE

This Guide is organised in three parts.

Part 1: Understand explains the whistleblowing landscape in South Africa. It looks at why whistleblowing matters, who may be protected, what the law is trying to do, and why the environment remains difficult and uneven.

Part 2: Navigate focuses on practice. It follows three phases: before disclosure, making a disclosure, and after disclosure. These sections deal with judgement, preparation, safer communication, channel choice, retaliation, documentation, support, and recovery.

Part 3: Protect and Reform looks outward. It considers what stronger protection should look like, the role of institutions and society, possible reform developments, and key resources and referral pathways.

The Guide does not need to be read in strict order. Some readers may begin with the practical sections. Others may first need a clearer sense of the broader legal and institutional terrain. Throughout the Guide it is important to remember that general guidance can support awareness and planning but cannot replace advice tailored to the facts of a particular case.

How this Guide is organised

KEY DEFINITIONS

Selected definitions in the context of whistleblowing are provided to help navigate the Guide. These terms are used in practical ways throughout the handbook.

Whistleblower

A person who discloses, or is considering disclosing, information about serious wrongdoing, risk, abuse of power, corruption, fraud, illegality, or other impropriety in circumstances where speaking up serves a wider public, ethical, or organisational purpose.

Protected disclosure

A disclosure that falls within the legal framework for protection. Not every disclosure is protected in the same way, and protection depends on the facts, the route used, and the law that applies.

Occupational detriment

Work-related harm or disadvantage suffered because a person made, intended to make, or was believed to have made a protected disclosure. This can include dismissal, suspension, demotion, harassment, intimidation, 'forced' transfer, blocked promotion, disciplinary action, or other workplace retaliation.

Retaliation

Any harmful response to whistleblowing or attempted whistleblowing. Retaliation may be formal or informal, overt or subtle, immediate or cumulative.

Confidentiality

A commitment to limit who can access the identity of the whistleblower and the information provided. Confidentiality reduces some risks, but it does not guarantee safety.

Anonymity

A situation in which the whistleblower's identity is not disclosed. Anonymous reporting may reduce risk, but identity can still sometimes be inferred from the detail, timing, or context of the disclosure.

Witness protection

A specialised legal protection regime designed mainly for witnesses or prospective witnesses in criminal justice settings. It is different from general whistleblower protection.

Public interest

A concern that goes beyond a private dispute and affects the public, an organisation, public resources, safety, rights, accountability, or the rule of law.

Internal reporting

Reporting through structures inside an organisation, such as an ethics office, hotline, line manager, HR, compliance unit, audit function, or board route.

External reporting

Reporting to a body outside the organisation, such as an oversight institution, law-enforcement body, civil-society organisation, or, in some cases, the media.

PART 1 | UNDERSTAND

CHAPTER 1

Understanding the Whistleblowing Ecosystem

Whistleblowing in South Africa is not only a legal issue. [Ecosystem Paper] It is a human experience shaped by conscience, courage, fear, power, risk, and survival. People often decide whether to speak up in workplaces, families, and communities where the consequences may be serious and where the right path is not always clear.

This Guide begins with the broader landscape before turning to practical steps. That context matters because the decision to report wrongdoing is rarely only about principle. It is also about whether reporting channels can be trusted, whether the law clearly applies, whether the person is safe, and whether meaningful support is available if things go wrong.

Whistleblowing is more than a single moment

Concern → Decision → Disclosure → Response → Consequences → Support/Recovery

A landscape that is hard to measure

South Africa does not have a complete public record showing how many whistleblowers come forward each year, what sectors they come from, how many suffer retaliation, how many receive meaningful protection, or how many are able to rebuild their lives afterwards. [Literature Review]

Much of what is known comes from court cases, public reporting, civil-society engagement, commissions of inquiry, oversight failures, and the lived experiences of whistleblowers themselves. In many cases, public attention arrives only after harm has already begun, after dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, financial collapse, reputational damage, or serious family strain.

> The absence of complete data should not obscure the seriousness of whistleblower harm. It means that the available evidence must be read carefully, and that practical lessons should be drawn from the cases, experiences, and institutional failures that are known.

Why whistleblowing matters

Whistleblowing matters because wrongdoing does not stay contained. Corruption, fraud, abuse of power, safety failures, and other serious misconduct can drain public resources, weaken services, endanger lives, damage institutions, and erode trust in democracy.

People who speak up often do so because they believe something is seriously wrong and should not be hidden. In that sense, whistleblowers can play a vital role in protecting the public interest. But the costs of speaking up are often carried privately by the whistleblower and sometimes by those close to them.

> **Whistleblowing serves the public interest, but the costs are often carried in private.**

What whistleblowing is and what it is not

In everyday language, whistleblowing usually means reporting serious wrongdoing, abuse, illegality, corruption, fraud, danger, or other impropriety in circumstances where speaking up serves a wider public, ethical, or organisational purpose. South African law recognises certain disclosures about conduct that has taken place, is taking place, or is likely to take place, provided the disclosure falls within the categories set out in law.

That broad understanding is useful, but the law does not protect every concern in the same way. In South Africa, the key legal question is often not simply whether a person acted bravely or responsibly, but whether the disclosure falls within the framework of a protected disclosure.

It is also important to distinguish whistleblowing from other workplace complaints. Whistleblowing is generally concerned with exposing wrongdoing in the public interest. Personal employment disputes, such as salary dissatisfaction, promotion grievances, interpersonal conflict, or ordinary performance issues, may fall under other laws or workplace processes, including the Labour Relations Act (LRA), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), or internal grievance procedures.

This distinction matters because using the wrong route can weaken a case or delay appropriate support. Not every genuine whistleblower fits neatly into the categories currently recognised by law, and some people may sit at the edges of protection because of their role, the kind of information they hold, or the way they disclose it. Early legal or other appropriate professional advice can therefore be important before steps are taken that may create risk.

Is it whistleblowing or something else?

Issue	Reason Not Covered	Avenue
Salary disputes or dissatisfaction with pay	Are typically contractual or human resource (HR) matters, not unlawful conduct.	Internal HR grievance procedures, LRA
Disciplinary actions or unfair treatment claims	These fall under labour law (LRA), or the Employment Equity Act.	Internal policies; LRA, Employment Equity Act
Workload complaints or poor working conditions	Unless they pose a serious health/ safety risk, they are not protected disclosures.	Internal policies and procedures; BCEA
Interpersonal conflicts (e.g., bullying, favouritism, personality clashes)	Unless linked to unlawful discrimination, these are ordinary workplace grievances	Internal HR grievance procedures
Performance appraisals or promotion grievances	Seen as personal disputes, not irregular activity.	Internal HR performance policies and processes, grievance procedures, LRA
General dissatisfaction with management style or policies	Not considered unlawful or irregular conduct.	Internal processes

Identifying the Right Framework

1. Is the issue about unlawful conduct?

Typically matters such as fraud, corruption, unsafe practices, discrimination, abuse of power, falsification of records, or concealment of illegality may point toward a whistleblowing or protected disclosure route.

2. Is the issue mainly about fairness in employment?

Such as dismissal, retrenchment, promotion, wages, workload, interpersonal conflict, or ordinary performance disputes may point toward the LRA, BCEA, Employment Equity Act, internal policies, or grievance procedures.

3. What remedy is being sought?

Protection from retaliation may point toward the Protected Disclosures Act. Reinstatement, compensation for unfair dismissal, or workplace fairness remedies may point toward labour-law routes.

Key Takeaway

- **The protected disclosures law protects qualifying disclosures of wrongdoing. The LRA and related labour-law frameworks protect employees in many workplace disputes about fairness.**
- **The distinction matters because whistleblowing cases and ordinary employment disputes may require different forums, evidence, remedies, and strategies.**

Who may be protected and who may still fall through the cracks

South Africa's main whistleblowing law is the Protected Disclosures Act (PDA)[1]. It is designed to encourage the disclosure of certain kinds of wrongdoing and to protect workers from occupational detriment when they make protected disclosures.

The law was strengthened by the 2017 amendment, which broadened protection to a wider category of workers, including some independent contractors, consultants, agents, and others who render services. Even so, the framework remains shaped mainly by workplace relationships and workplace retaliation.

Protection may be clearer where the harm is linked to the disclosure and takes an employment-related form, such as dismissal, suspension, disciplinary action, demotion, intimidation, blocked promotion, or other work-related punishment. In practice, however, real life is often more complicated. Some people may be in precarious work, informal settings, short-term contractual roles, or situations that do not fit neatly into a standard employment relationship.

Where there is uncertainty, advice matters. The resources at the end of the Guide may help identify possible starting points.

A complex environment shaped by social and economic realities

People do not all enter the whistleblowing process from the same position. The decision to speak up is shaped not only by what a person knows, but also by what they could risk losing.

For some, retaliation may mean temporary discomfort. For others, it may mean loss of income, inability to support dependants, damage to future work prospects, emotional strain, social isolation, or increased exposure to discrimination and exclusion. [Hyperlink Paper 1] Factors such as class, race, gender, disability, age, youth, care responsibilities, employment precarity, and workplace hierarchy may all affect how risk is experienced and how difficult recovery may be.

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1 Note: At the time of finalising this Guide, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development had released the Protected Disclosures Bill, 2026 for public comment. The Bill proposes significant reforms to South Africa's whistleblower protection framework, **but it is not yet law**. Until any reform is enacted and brought into operation, the existing Protected Disclosures Act 26 of 2000 remains the applicable legal framework. See Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, *Protected Disclosures Bill, 2026: Invitation for Public Comments*.

This is why the language of courage should be used carefully. Courage matters, but so do conditions. A fair system should not assume that people can speak up safely without support, preparation, and meaningful protection.

What can shape a person's level of risk?

Income Insecurity | Employment Status | Family Responsibilities | Disability | Workplace Power | Social Stigma

What the law is trying to do

The law is meant to encourage people to disclose serious wrongdoing and to protect them from retaliation when they do so in recognised circumstances. In simple terms, the PDA aims to make it safer to speak up about impropriety.

In practice, however, the law is only part of the picture. A person may still face uncertainty about whether they are protected, which reporting channel to use, whether confidentiality will be respected, and whether support will be available if harm follows.

For that reason, the Guide emphasises timing, choice of reporting channel, documentation, communication, and support. Legal protection is important, but it should not be treated as the only safeguard.

What is occupational detriment?

One of the most important terms in whistleblowing law is occupational detriment. In simple terms, this means work-related harm suffered because a person made, intended to make, or was believed to have made a protected disclosure.

Occupational detriment can take obvious forms such as dismissal, suspension, demotion, disciplinary action, transfer against a person's will, refusal of promotion, harassment, intimidation, or being denied work opportunities. It can also include less obvious forms of work-related disadvantage, such as being frozen out of meaningful work, sidelined, or subjected to selective scrutiny after disclosure.

At the same time, not every unpleasant workplace experience will amount to occupational detriment. Ordinary supervision, lawful and fairly applied performance management, neutral restructuring, or routine operational decisions do not automatically become occupational detriment simply because a disclosure exists in the background. Context, timing, the employer's conduct, and any pattern of adverse treatment may be important in assessing whether the disadvantage is genuinely linked to the disclosure.

The practical question is often not only "Did something bad happen at work?" but also "Is there a clear link between the disclosure and the disadvantage that followed?"

Occupational detriment: what it could include and what it may not

Potentially Disclosure Related	Unlikely to be Disclosure Related
Dismissal	Ordinary supervision
Suspension	Genuinely neutral policy change
Demotion, blocked promotion	Fairly applied discipline unrelated to the disclosure
Retaliatory hearings	Routine management decisions
Transfer	Business efficiency decisions affecting more than one individual
Intimidation	Response to unplanned, unanticipated event such as a national disaster

Why the period before disclosure is often difficult

Before any formal report is made, many people face difficult questions with limited certainty. They may suspect wrongdoing but have incomplete information. They may worry that internal channels are unsafe, that confidentiality will fail, or that they may be identified, disbelieved, isolated, or accused of acting in bad faith.

The pre-disclosure period is therefore important. It is a stage for reflection, risk assessment, early record-keeping, advice-seeking, and careful judgement. Where possible, a potential whistleblower should clarify the concern, document what is known, consider likely risks, and seek advice before taking steps that may be difficult to reverse.

Useful questions may include:

- What is the concern?
- Has the concern already been addressed, but not yet implemented?
- Who may be involved?
- What are the likely risks?
- What protection, if any, may be available?
- What kind of support may be needed?

Preparation can reduce avoidable risk and support a clearer, more credible disclosure.

> **The pre-disclosure stage is an important opportunity to strengthen one's position. By clarifying concerns, documenting what is known, and seeking early advice avoidable risks are reduced and confidence is built. Preparation is a deliberate act of empowerment that ensures the disclosure is clear, credible, and supported.**

What happens after disclosure?

Whistleblowing is often discussed as a single act of disclosure, but in reality it may mark the start of a longer process. Some whistleblowers are heard and supported while others may be ignored, isolated, discredited, suspended, dismissed, threatened, or drawn into lengthy internal or legal processes.

Financial strain, emotional distress, family pressure, reputational harm, or threats to safety may follow. Investigations may be slow, institutions may become defensive, and confidentiality may be fragile. This is why whistleblowing should be understood as a journey rather than a single moment.

Whistleblower protection vs. witness protection

Whistleblower protection focuses on protecting people from retaliation when they disclose wrongdoing in recognised circumstances.

Witness protection is different. It is a specialised criminal justice mechanism for witnesses or prospective witnesses in criminal proceedings. Reporting serious misconduct does not automatically trigger witness protection.

At present, witness protection is not offered under the PDA as a general protection mechanism for whistleblowers but is an area of legal reform that is included in the 2026 Bill. For now, this distinction reinforces the need for advice, careful planning, and ongoing risk assessment, especially where a matter may later become criminal in nature.

A process, not a moment

A useful way to understand whistleblowing is to see it as a pathway. It may begin with a troubling observation, move into uncertainty and decision-making, lead to a disclosure, and then continue through response, investigation, retaliation, support, recovery, or long-term consequences.

Thinking about the journey in three phases comprising pre-disclosure, the disclosure itself, and post-disclosure helps show why protection should not begin only after harm becomes visible. A system that values whistleblowers should support them before, during, and after disclosure.

Whistleblowing is more than a single moment

Pre Disclosure	**Concern and Asessment:** • Something seems wrong; What is the issue? • What are the risks? **Preparation** • Records • Advice • Safer communication
Disclosure	• Internal or external route • Institutional response: investigation, silence, push back • Consequences
Post Disclosure	• Support/recovery • Remedies, support, reintegration

What the courts have said: a few practical lessons

Recent case law offers practical lessons about whistleblower protection and workplace disputes[2]. Two points stand out. First, where the requirements of the PDA are met, courts may recognise that retaliation for a protected disclosure can attract serious consequences, including compensation. Second, not every workplace dispute involving a whistleblower will be decided under the PDA. In some matters, ordinary labour-law principles and procedures remain central.

A few practical lessons emerge:

- Protected disclosures can attract meaningful protection and remedies.
- Courts may look beyond the employer's stated reason for adverse action where retaliation appears to be disguised as ordinary workplace action.
- The PDA is not a substitute for ordinary labour law. Some workplace disputes must still be dealt with through labour-law routes.

Key takeaway:

The PDA protects qualifying disclosures of wrongdoing. The LRA and broader labour-law principles continue to govern many workplace disputes. In practice, whether a whistleblower succeeds will depend on whether the disclosure meets the statutory requirements and whether a link can be shown between the disclosure and the adverse treatment complained of.

2 Examples include Kunene v Akani Egoli (Pty) Ltd t/a Gold Reef City; Phosa v Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality; and NUMSA obo Members v SAA Technical SOC Ltd.

Whistleblowing in South Africa takes place in a setting that is legally important, socially difficult, and often deeply unequal. The law provides some protection, especially after the 2017 reforms, but it does not remove uncertainty or guarantee safety.

Understanding this landscape is the first step. The next part of the Guide explores the practical questions that arise before disclosure, when making a disclosure, and after disclosure.

PART 2 | NAVIGATING

Navigating the whistleblowing journey

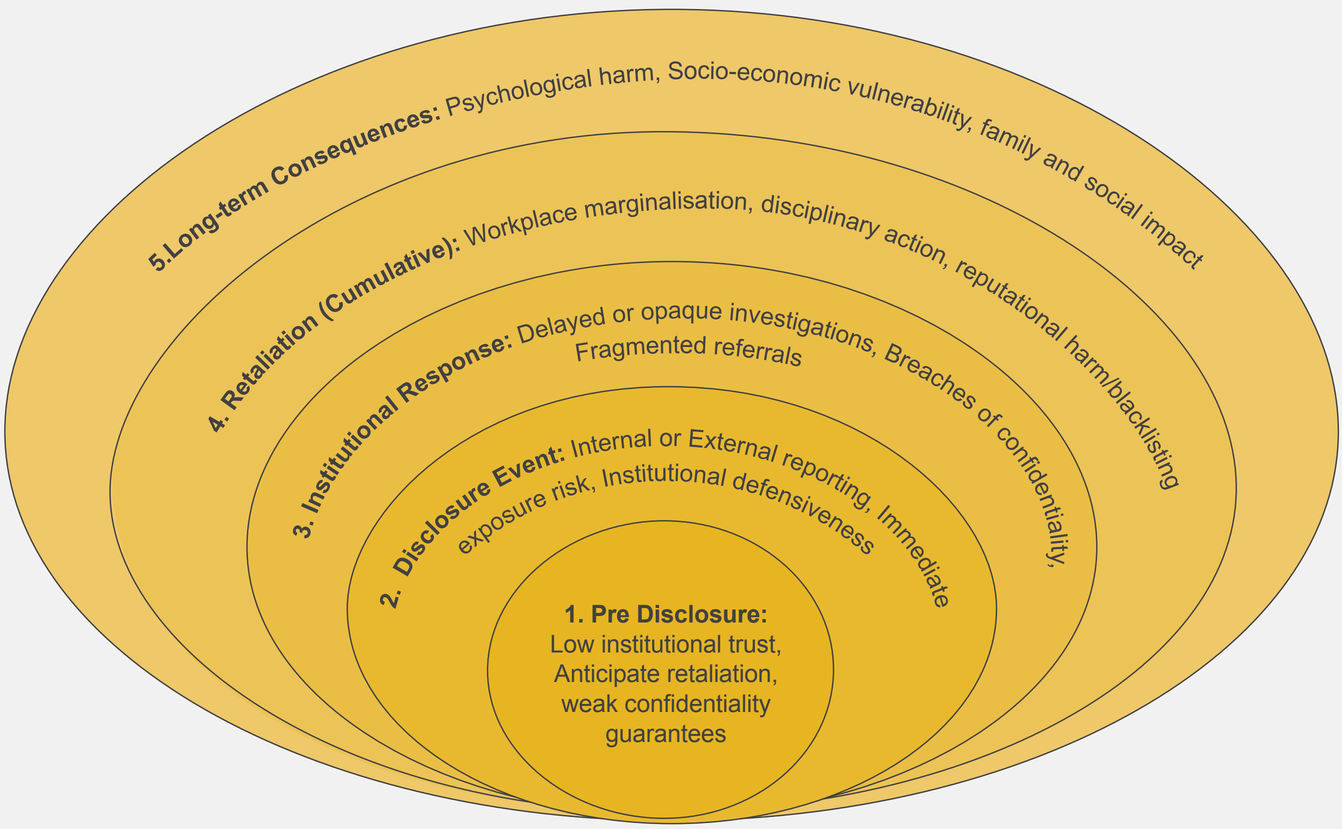
Whistleblowing is rarely a single act. It is usually a process that begins before any formal report is made and continues afterwards. Some of the most important decisions arise early, when a person is still trying to understand what they know, how serious it is, what risks may follow, and whether any reporting route can be trusted.

This part of the Guide focuses on three phases: pre-disclosure, making the actual disclosure; and the post disclosure phase.

It cannot replace legal or other professional advice, but it can help a potential whistleblower ask better questions, make safer decisions, and prepare for the process ahead.

The whistleblowing pathway

Assess and Prepare → Choose and Disclose → Respond and Recover



CHAPTER 2

Before disclosure: pause, assess, prepare

The period before disclosure is often the most uncertain and the most important. This is the stage when a person is trying to understand what they have seen, what it may mean, who may be involved, and what risks may follow if they speak up. In many cases, the safest and most effective disclosure is not the quickest one. Careful preparation can reduce avoidable harm, clarify options, and strengthen a whistleblower's position if matters later become contested.

2.1 Start by clarifying the concern

Before acting, it helps to name the concern as clearly as possible. Ask what exactly seems wrong. Is it corruption, procurement irregularity, fraud, abuse of authority, falsification of records, danger to health, environment or safety, victimisation, concealment of illegality or some other serious impropriety? Some matters are purely personal grievances. Others are public-interest concerns. Some contain elements of both.

Detailed proof is not required at this stage. However, it is useful to distinguish clearly between what is known, what is suspected, and what still needs to be checked. That distinction becomes important later, especially if motives, credibility, or conduct are challenged.

Checklist: What is the concern?

Step 1: Identify the Concern
What seems wrong?

- Corruption / fraud / procurement irregularity
- Abuse of authority / falsification of records
- Health, safety, environment risks
- Concealment of illegality
- Personal grievance vs. Public interest issue

Step 2: Clarify What Is Known
Separate:

- Facts (direct knowledge)
- Suspicions (reasonable concerns)
- Unknowns (still to check)

Step 3: Assess Risks
Consider:

- Personal risks (retaliation, victimisation)
- Organisational risks (career impact, strained relations)
- Safety risks (physical or reputational harm)

Step 4: Prepare Information

- Gather reasonable supporting material
- Keep secure notes of what, when, and how it was learnt
- Avoid unlawful evidence collection

Step 5: Pause & Reflect

- Is this disclosure in good faith and for the public interest?
- Determine how to respond if motives or credibility are challenged.

2.2 Assess risk before taking action

A potential whistleblower should treat risk assessment as part of responsible preparation, not as cowardice or indecision. In practice, many harms begin before the law can help. Internal systems may be compromised, confidentiality may fail, and implicated people may act quickly once they suspect a disclosure is coming.

A useful risk assessment should consider at least six areas:

Employment risk: Who has power over the person's job, contract, duties, reporting line, access to systems, performance review, or promotion? Could the person be suspended, isolated, transferred, or sidelined quickly?

Financial risk: If income is interrupted, what financial exposure may arise? Are children, dependants, or others likely to be affected?

Legal and procedural risk: Is there a realistic chance that the organisation may use disciplinary, grievance, confidentiality, or performance processes against the person?

Digital risk: Are employer devices, systems, networks, or internal messaging platforms being used in ways that may be monitored?

Psychosocial risk: What emotional support is available? How is the person coping already? How might prolonged uncertainty affect wellbeing?

Family and safety risk: Could the fallout affect a partner, children, housing, schooling, transport, family stability, or personal security?

Risk is not experienced evenly. Class, race, disability, gender, age, employment precarity, family responsibilities, and workplace hierarchy can all affect how retaliation is experienced and how it may affect recovery.

2.3 Protecting information and communications

Preparation includes protecting information carefully. Where there is concern about monitoring or compromised systems, employer-issued devices, work email, office networks, or internal messaging platforms should be used with caution.

Safer personal channels such as an independent email may be appropriate where lawful and secure. Keep records secured personally and use encrypted files to strengthen security. Use a personal laptop to document evidence. A simple chronology of events should be kept. Records should be preserved carefully and organised from oldest to newest. Secure backups may be useful where lawful and appropriate. Records should not be altered, originals should not be removed unlawfully, and sensitive material including company information should not be circulated widely to external recipients. Information should be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

It is also wise to think ahead about loss of access. In complex matters, precautionary suspension is common. Once suspended, a worker may lose access to work email, internal systems, shared drives, or records that later become important. Where lawful and appropriate, personal notes, timelines, and legitimately held materials should therefore be organised and stored safely in advance.

Care should be taken not to remove or copy information unlawfully, and advice should be sought where the position is unclear. Preparation should never involve altering evidence, concealing material wrongdoing, or acting in ways that may amount to defeating or obstructing the course of justice.

Safer communication and evidence handling

PLEASE DO	PLEASE DON'T
• **Seek legal or other expert advice as early as possible.** Multiple practical guides stress that early advice helps with choosing where to report, confidentiality, privilege, retaliation risk, and lawful handling of information. (Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds)	• **Assume confidentiality and anonymity are the same thing.** Guidance repeatedly warns that a person's identity may still be inferred from context, timing, role, detail, or metadata. (PPLAAF)
• **Use safer communications where risk is high.** Comparative guidance, especially on source protection, recommends encrypted channels, careful handling of metadata and identifiers. (PPLAAF)	• **Rush into anonymous reporting without thinking through the trade-offs.** It may reduce immediate exposure, but it can also make follow-up, credibility assessment, and legal protection more difficult in some systems. (Protect)
• **Be clear about the kind of concern being raised.** Good guidance consistently distinguishes a public-interest disclosure from a personal grievance, even where the two overlap. (Acas)	• **Use a grievance route when the issue is really whistleblowing.** Good practice materials caution that grievance procedures are usually designed for personal employment disputes, not broader wrongdoing affecting others. (Acas)

• **Act on a reasonable belief, not perfect proof.** The investigation does not need to be personally completed, but one should be able to explain why the concern appears serious and genuine. (Protect)	• **Rely on rumour, hearsay, or anger-driven accusation.** Be measured, specific, and factual. (Protect)
• **Separate what is known, what is suspected, and what was reported by others.** That distinction protects credibility and helps others assess the disclosure properly. (Protect)	• **Take confidential documents or access files unlawfully just to "build the case."** Practical advice strongly warns that this can create separate legal and disciplinary problems. (Protect) It is also important to understand the record management policies and procedures in place, including identity trails created when accessing certain records.
• **Choose the reporting route carefully.** Internal reporting may sometimes allow quicker action, but not where implicated persons control the process or cannot be trusted to respond fairly. (Protect)	• **Approach the media impulsively.** Media disclosure can be important, but comparative guidance treats it as high-risk and requiring careful judgement, secure communication, and source protection. (PPLAAF)
• **Preserve information carefully and lawfully.** Keep records organised and intact, but avoid altering, embellishing, or mishandling them. (Protect)	• **Disclose to colleagues, friends, or multiple bodies unnecessarily.** Wider circulation can increase exposure, distort the issue, and make containment harder. (PPLAAF)
• **Assume retaliation can be subtle as well as obvious.** Exclusion, reputational smearing, silence, resource deprivation, and process abuse may all form part of retaliation.	• **Expect the institution to recognise retaliation only when it is dramatic.** Many forms are incremental and cumulative, so patterns of actions are important in making a case of retaliation.
• **Seek support in layers, not only from one source.** Strengthen awareness, and seek legal, psychosocial, workplace, security and practical support where needed.	• **Assume speaking up is the end of the process.** Most guidance treats whistleblowing as a journey requiring preparation, follow-up, support, and, at times, recovery and reintegration.
• **Keep a dated record.** Maintain a chronology of the concern, disclosures made, responses received, and any changes in treatment after reporting. (Protect)	• **Use employer systems as though they are private.** Workplace devices, email, and networks may compromise confidentiality and future strategy. This risk is implicit in the emphasis external guidance places on confidential channels and secure communication. (OECD)

2.4 Review the internal policy landscape before speaking

If the organisation has a whistleblowing, ethics, anti-fraud, monitoring of communications, grievance, disciplinary, or protected disclosure policy, read it carefully before acting where possible. It is helpful to check what channels it offers, who receives reports, how confidentiality is addressed, and whether there is any route independent from ordinary line management or HR.

Vague, inaccessible, or heavily management-controlled, policy documents may also be useful information. These may not mean internal reporting is impossible, but it should inform the level of caution and planning required.

2.5 Seek advice before disclosing, where possible

Whistleblowers should seek legal or other appropriate professional advice where they can, especially before taking a step that may be difficult to reverse. Advice can help assess whether the concern may amount to a protected disclosure, what reporting route is safest, what documentation matters most, and what risks need closer attention.

Civil-society organisations, unions, pro bono services, and other support structures may also help with referrals, strategy, psychosocial support, or practical guidance. Advice is not only about law. It may also help with emotional readiness, safety planning, or understanding likely institutional responses.

Where cost is a concern, it is still worth asking about legal aid, university clinics, pro bono services, or low-cost options. The resource section at the end may help identify starting points.

2.6 Preparatory steps that can strengthen a whistleblower's position later

Preparation cannot eliminate retaliation, but it can place a whistleblower in a stronger position if the employer later acts against them.

Keep a clear timeline of the disclosure and any events around it. Note dates, meetings, instructions, warnings, changes in treatment, and who was involved.

Gather relevant records and organise them chronologically. This may include policies, performance reviews, contracts, emails, notices, meeting invitations, hearing documents, payslips, and evidence of the disclosure itself.

Past performance history should be reviewed. If performance suddenly becomes an issue after disclosure, past appraisals, positive feedback, prior role expansions, bonuses, or evidence of acceptable work may help show that later "performance concerns" are new, selective, or opportunistic.

Check whether similar allegations or concerns have already been raised, investigated, resolved, or litigated. If a related matter has already been addressed by the employer, an oversight body, or a court, that may affect how current charges or proceedings should be understood.

Be careful about acting as a proxy. Sometimes a person becomes the visible face of concerns that affect a wider group. Where a matter is raised on behalf of another staff member, or because that staff member is too vulnerable to do so, careful thought should be given to confidentiality, credibility, and personal exposure.

Think ahead about representation. If formal processes begin later, it helps to know whether the relevant forum permits representation, on what terms, and whether the chosen representative is genuinely independent. A representative may need access to sensitive information. That makes conflict of interest important.

It is recommended not to wait until charges arrive to understand the terrain. Preparation is often what allows a whistleblower to respond calmly if formal steps begin suddenly.

Before disclosure, the aim is not to do everything at once. It is to move from uncertainty to better judgement. That may mean slowing down, clarifying the concern, assessing risk honestly, organising information carefully, and seeking advice before taking a step that cannot easily be undone.

CHAPTER 3

Making a disclosure: choosing channels and communicating safely

Once the concern is clearer and the risks have been considered, the next question is where and how to disclose. This is not only a legal question. It is also a strategic and safety-related one. The most suitable route will depend on the nature of the wrongdoing, who is implicated, what powers the receiving body has, and whether the route is likely to be safe, credible, and effective.

3.1 Choose a channel carefully

A useful starting point is to identify the purpose of the disclosure: stopping harm urgently, triggering an investigation, preserving a record, seeking accountability, protecting the person making the disclosure, or a combination of these aims.

Then ask whether the proposed channel has the power to act. Does it have jurisdiction? Can it investigate, refer or simply redirect the matter elsewhere, protect the whistleblower, or only receive information? Choosing the wrong route can cause delays, expose identity, and increase frustration.

3.2. Internal reporting: when it may help, and when caution is needed

Internal reporting may be appropriate where the system is credible, the route is genuinely independent, and implicated people do not control it. Internal channels may include an ethics office, hotline, internal audit, board-level route, compliance function, or another designated mechanism.

But internal reporting is not automatically safest. Confidentiality breaches, dependence on management, and the later use of internal process as reprisal are real concerns. Special caution is required before proceeding through internal reporting where senior leadership is implicated, prior internal complaints were ignored, or the organisation has a history of reprisal.

Do not assume that "internal first" is always wise in practice simply because of policy or it appears orderly on paper.

3.3 When might a person go outside internal reporting?

Internal reporting is not the only route available. In practical terms, a person may consider going outside internal reporting where:

- senior management or the board may be implicated.
- internal channels are not independent.
- previous internal reports were ignored or mishandled.
- there is reason to fear concealment, retaliation, or destruction of evidence.
- the matter requires a regulator, oversight body, or criminal justice response.
- urgent public harm may result if the issue remains inside the organisation.

Illustrative example:
A compliance officer discovers that procurement records appear to have been manipulated and that a senior executive who oversees the ethics hotline may be involved. In those circumstances, internal reporting may not be the safest or most credible first step, and external advice may be necessary before disclosure.

3.4 External routes: powers and limits

External institutions can be important, but each has its own mandate. Some focus on maladministration, some on auditing and financial irregularity, some on criminal investigation, some on prosecution, and some on rights protection or advocacy. Approaching an external body does not automatically mean that the person making the disclosure will be protected as a whistleblower, nor that the institution can resolve employment retaliation against that person.

This is one reason careful selectivity in choosing the reporting route matters. If the concern is mainly corruption in procurement, one route may be better than another. If the concern is retaliation at work, a different forum or remedy may be needed. Sometimes more than one route is necessary, but that should be done carefully, not impulsively.

Common external reporting routes (Note)

Institution	What it does	Role in relation to whistleblowers	What it cannot do & practical notes
Public Protector South Africa (PPSA)	Investigates maladministration, abuse of power, and improper conduct in state affairs	Receives disclosures under the PDA and may investigate systemic wrongdoing	Potentially long timelines; limited capacity; does not provide physical or economic protection

South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)	Protects, monitors, and promotes respect for human rights	May receive disclosures involving rights violations and provide advocacy or referrals	Remedial powers contested; limited enforcement authority, resource constraints
The Public Service Commission, Commission for Gender Equality, & Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.	Institutions with rights, governance, and integrity protection mandates	May receive mandate related disclosures	Remedial powers are limited. Each body has different complaints procedures, matters be referred to other institutions, all operate within resource constraints
Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA)	Financial oversight & audit of public institutions	May act on information disclosed during audits or submitted externally	Does not offer individual whistleblower protection
Special Investigating Unit (SIU)	Investigates maladministration and corruption in state institutions under Presidential Proclamation.	May act on disclosures if they fall within authorised investigations, rather than isolated incidents.	Cannot act without a proclamation; does not protect whistleblowers; no direct prosecutorial power
National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)	Prosecutes criminal offences on behalf of the state	May rely on whistleblower evidence in criminal prosecutions, including corruption cases	Focused on prosecution, not protection; whistleblowers may be treated as witnesses rather than protected persons
South African Police Service (SAPS)	Investigates criminal offences	Receives reports under the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act in South Africa (PRECCA), including mandatory reports by persons in positions of authority	Reporting does not trigger whistleblower protection; criminal justice processes may increase exposure
Financial Intelligence Center (FIC)	Collects and analyses reports of suspicious financial transactions to combat money laundering and related crimes.	Whistleblowers can disclose financial irregularities; the FIC may use this information and refer matters to law enforcement.	Does not investigate or prosecute directly; offers no personal protection. Focus is intelligence and referral, so disclosures may need parallel reporting to SAPS or NPA.

3.5 Civil society and media: high impact and importance, but higher risk

Civil-society organisations can be valuable sources of advice, referral, support, advocacy, and where appropriate public pressure. Journalists can also play an important accountability role, especially where official systems are compromised or inactive [Ecosystem Paper and Accountability Paper].

But public disclosure is usually more exposed and often more complex. Journalists are not legal representatives, not personal protectors, and cannot guarantee outcomes. Media engagement can increase visibility and pressure, but it may also increase legal and personal risk. Timing, verification, source protection, and confidentiality should therefore be considered carefully. Specialist advice is especially important before approaching media or making broader disclosure.

3.6 Confidentiality, anonymity and identity protection

Many people considering disclosure understandably hope to remain anonymous. Anonymity can reduce some risks, but it is not a guarantee of complete safety. Identity may still be inferred from the detail of the information, the timing of the report, the position held by the whistleblower, the group of people who had access to the facts, or the pattern of internal events.

Confidentiality is different from anonymity. A report may be treated as confidential but still be circulated among investigators, managers, legal teams, boards, or oversight structures. It is therefore important to think realistically about how identity may become known directly or indirectly.

If confidentiality is important, say so clearly at the outset and, where possible, in writing. Ask who will have access to the report, whether any personal identity information will be shared for investigative purposes, how records will be stored, and how consent will be managed if identity needs to be disclosed further.

It should also be front of mind that anonymity is not static. A person may start anonymously and later become identifiable because of process, litigation, appeal, public reporting, or repeated internal engagement. That is why anonymity should be understood as part of an ongoing risk assessment, not as a one-time fix.

Hints for strengthening anonymous disclosure

Best practice	Description
Use secure reporting platforms	Trusted whistleblower portals (e.g., Corruption Watch, The Whistleblower House, WSPR, OUTA, PPLAAF) allow anonymous submissions.
Avoid workplace channels	Internal reporting may expose identity unless assessment shows the system explicitly supports anonymity.

Strip metadata from documents	Remove identifying, personal information from files (e.g., author names, location data).
Use encrypted email or a virtual private network (VPN)	Protect the IP address and identity when submitting disclosures.
Use trusted intermediaries	Non-governmental organisation/s or legal advisers can help protect identity while supporting credibility of the report.
Avoid voice or in-person disclosures	These may compromise anonymity unless done through intermediaries.
Do not disclose personal motives or relationships	These can be used to infer identity later.

The decision to make an anonymous disclosure is best taken with caution. Anonymous disclosure has benefits for safety but has disadvantages too. Usually, anonymous disclosures face credibility challenges and may be harder to investigate, and to communicate with investigators.

If a disclosure is made anonymously and the whistleblower's identity is later revealed or established: Protection may be difficult unless the person can prove that they were the original source and acted in good faith. If the person's identity is revealed after the fact and the employer retaliates, it may be harder to claim protection unless the person can show that the disclosure was made, the correct legal process was followed, and the motives were honest and motivated in the public interest.

3.7 Make the disclosure clearly and carefully

A disclosure is easier to act on when it is factual, organised, and clear. Where possible, separate facts from assumptions. Identify dates, people, places, and documents. Avoid exaggeration and emotionally charged language where it is not necessary. Keep a record of when, how, and to whom the disclosure was made. If confidentiality is requested, record that too.

Careful communication does not mean sounding cold or detached. It means presenting the concern in a way that is less vulnerable to distortion later. It also means respecting legal duties around evidence, process, and fairness. A whistleblower should not be encouraged to act unlawfully or to interfere with proceedings.

The PDA does not protect deliberate abuse of whistleblowing processes and provides for criminal consequences for knowingly false disclosures. This underlines the importance of acting honestly, distinguishing fact from suspicion, and avoiding exaggeration or allegations known to be false.

3.8 What if more than one person is raising the same concern?

Sometimes more than one worker is aware of the same wrongdoing, or more than one person has already raised concerns inside the organisation. This can matter in several ways.

It may strengthen the credibility of the concern. It may show that the issue is systemic rather than isolated. It may also reveal that the employer already knew about the matter but failed to act.

At the same time, multiple whistleblowers may create additional risk. People may have various levels of exposure, various levels of evidence, and different appetites for publicity or legal action. One person may want anonymity while another is ready to go public. One may later withdraw while another persists.

Where more than one person is involved, it helps to think carefully about consistency, confidentiality, representation, and whether anyone is being exposed as a proxy for others. Joint action can sometimes strengthen a disclosure, but it can also make protection more complex.

> **Making a disclosure is not only about speaking the truth. It is also about choosing a route that is appropriate, communicating carefully, and protecting the whistleblower as far as possible while doing so. Where there is uncertainty, it is better to pause and seek advice than to escalate in a way that increases avoidable risk.**

CHAPTER 4

After disclosure: retaliation, support, remedies and recovery

For many whistleblowers, the hardest part comes after speaking up. This is when the theory of protection meets the reality of pushback. [Accountability Paper] Some people are ignored, sidelined, or discredited. Others are transferred, suspended, or even dismissed. What looks like routine procedure can sometimes be punishment in disguise. And for many, the silence of institutions or the cost of fighting back can feel overwhelming.

This chapter is not only about remedies. It is also about restoration. In practice, recovery includes more than a legal outcome, but should involve psychosocial support, income stabilisation, counselling, professional reintegration, and efforts to restore dignity after prolonged harm.

Post disclosure is not limited to spotting retaliation early. It also involves understanding how retaliation works, keeping careful records, and finding support before the damage goes too deep.

4.1 Retaliation is often cumulative, not a single event

Retaliation is not always immediate or dramatic. It may covert, or subtle and may include distancing, silence, exclusion, or reputational signalling. The whistleblower may be left out of meetings, stripped of duties, blocked from systems, isolated from colleagues, or labelled as difficult, disloyal, unstable, or "not a team player. Each step may appear small on its own. Together, they can become a coordinated pattern of pressure and de-legitimation.

4.1.1 Internal processes can themselves become retaliation

One of the most difficult realities for whistleblowers is that retaliation is often channelled through formal internal processes. This may include grievance procedures, disciplinary investigations, suspensions, performance management, restructuring, transfer, or repeated calls to explain or defend matters that have already been dealt with.

Because these processes appear lawful, they can be difficult to challenge quickly. Yet process can be weaponised.

For that reason, close attention is needed to both overt and covert retaliation through process.

Overt process retaliation may include:

suspension shortly after disclosure.

notice of disciplinary action following an ignored or unwelcome report.

transfer, demotion, or blocked promotion.

abrupt allegations of misconduct, confidentiality breach, or disloyalty.

repeated grievance or disciplinary hearings over a brief period.

parallel investigations that multiply pressure without clear purpose.

Covert process retaliation may include:

performance management suddenly intensifying after years of acceptable service.

work being removed and then non-performance being alleged.

deadlines, targets, or compliance expectations being selectively applied.

exclusion from decision-making followed by criticism for lack of contribution.

informal complaints being escalated into formal processes.

restructuring or role changes designed to marginalise rather than support.

It is particularly important to look for patterns over time. A single grievance or hearing may not say much on its own. But repeated proceedings, shifting allegations, recycled complaints, or serial internal actions can suggest process-based harassment rather than legitimate management.

Retaliation can be subtle, formal, or cumulative

Form of Retaliation	Source	Short-Term Impact	Long-term Impact
Exclusion at work	Employer	Isolation, Stress, Anxiety	Career stagnation, anxiety
Disciplinary action	Employer/HR	Loss of Income	Unemployment
Reputational damage	Sectoral networks	Stigma	Informal blacklisting
Threats and intimidation	External Actors	Fear, insecurity, anxiety	Chronic trauma

4.1.2 Questions to consider if formal internal action starts

If the employer starts a grievance, disciplinary, performance, transfer, restructuring, or related process after disclosure, it helps to ask some practical questions early.

What exactly is the allegation or process about? Ask for clarity.

Has this matter already been addressed before, either internally or externally?

How soon did this process begin after the disclosure?

Have similar concerns about conduct or performance ever been raised before? If not, what changed?

What is the documented track record? Prior positive appraisals, stable performance, promotions, role expansions, or commendations may be important if poor performance is suddenly raised.

How many proceedings have been initiated against the whistleblower in a short period? Multiple grievances, investigations, hearings, or management complaints may point to cumulative retaliation rather than isolated concern.

Are matters requiring a response overly broad, repetitive, or difficult to pin down?

Is the whistleblower being used as a stand-in or proxy for a wider conflict?

These questions do not prove retaliation on their own. But they can help a whistleblower and their advisor assess whether process is being used fairly or tactically.

Illustrative Example: ***retaliation through processes***
A long-serving employee with solid appraisals reports irregular contracting. Within weeks, she faces a precautionary suspension, a performance review, and two overlapping internal complaints. While each step is presented as routine, together they may tell a different story.

4.2 Representation is not a minor detail

If formal proceedings start, having the right representation can make a substantial difference. There may be a need to share sensitive details about the disclosure itself, fears of retaliation, or documents showing misconduct.

First, check if representation is allowed in that forum and under what rules. Internal hearings, labour processes, and courts all differ.

Second, choose carefully. A representative tied too closely to management, implicated parties, or workplace factions may weaken the whistleblower's position.

The goal is to have someone who can genuinely protect and support the whistleblower.

4.3 Document retaliation early and carefully

Retaliation is much easier to address later if it is documented early. Keep a dated log of incidents. Note who was involved, what happened, where, when, and how it affected the whistleblower. Keep copies of notices, warnings, performance plans, meeting requests, hearing bundles, payslips, contracts, policies, emails, messages, and any evidence of the disclosure itself. Organise all documents chronologically.

Where it is safe and lawful to do so, preserve evidence of threats, surveillance, blocking of system access, exclusion from meetings, or changing job duties. A clear chronology can help reveal patterns that may not be obvious from isolated documents.

Basic retaliation log

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED	WHO WAS INVOLVED	EVIDENCE	IMPACT	ACTION TAKEN

4.4 What if performance suddenly becomes the issue?

Performance management is one of the most common ways retaliations can be disguised. If performance is suddenly raised after a disclosure, compare the new allegations with records of past performance.

Ask:

- Were there prior warnings or consistent concerns before the disclosure?
- Has work previously been assessed as acceptable or good?
- Were duties recently reduced, changed, or made harder to perform?
- Was the person excluded from information, meetings, or systems and thereafter blamed for underperformance?
- Are standards being applied selectively or in a new way?

Gather any past appraisals, written feedback, role descriptions, project records, or performance-related correspondence that may help show a contrast between past assessment and post-disclosure treatment.

4.5 What if the institution goes silent?

Silence can be its own harm. The scenario where a report is made but is met with silence is not uncommon. The whistleblower may hear little more than vague promises. Investigations stall, files shift around, and responsibility gets passed on. The concern stays unresolved, while the whistleblower lives with ongoing uncertainty.

Where it feels safe, follow up in writing and keep records of requests for updates. But also recognise that silence from an institution may be a signal to rethink the strategy and seek support, rather than waiting endlessly.

4.6 When the matter enters multiple proceedings or the public domain

A whistleblowing matter may become the subject of more than one process at the same time. A disclosure may trigger internal proceedings, labour disputes, civil proceedings, criminal investigation, regulatory action, or appeals. Some of those processes may become public or partly public.

That has practical consequences. Statements made to journalists, on social media, in public meetings, or in research interviews may later be used, quoted, challenged, or recirculated in ways that increase risk. Even where identity is withheld, details may be enough to reveal who is involved.

For that reason, whistleblowers and their representatives should treat public communication carefully once formal processes are underway. Ongoing risk assessment remains important. Confidentiality should be discussed explicitly with legal representatives. Where there is a real risk of unnecessary exposure, legal representatives may need to consider appropriate protective steps, including applications for confidentiality or in camera proceedings where the law permits.

This does not mean a whistleblower must remain silent in all circumstances. It means public communication should be approached with judgement, strategy, and awareness that proceedings may overlap and continue for some time.

4.7 What happens when things go right?

Not every whistleblowing story ends in silence or retaliation. Sometimes a report is received responsibly, investigated properly, and followed by corrective action. Where that happens, a whistleblower may still need communication, reassurance, and protection against stigma.

A strong process often includes:

- acknowledgement that the report was received.
- clear communication about next steps.

- reasonable feedback, within legal limits.
- monitoring of corrective action.
- steps to prevent retaliation.
- support for reintegration where relationships have been strained.

Even where the institution responds well, a whistleblower could face discomfort, uncertainty, or reputational strain. A "successful" outcome should therefore be measured not only by whether wrongdoing was confirmed, but also by whether the whistleblower was treated fairly, kept appropriately informed, and protected from avoidable harm.

4.8 Seek help early: legal, psychosocial, practical

Whistleblowers should not try to carry post-disclosure burdens alone. Legal support may be needed to assess labour remedies, occupational detriment, dismissal, harassment, forum choice, or interim steps. Psychosocial support is also important. Emotional distress, family strain, social isolation, and prolonged uncertainty are central features of whistleblower harm, not secondary matters. [Whistleblower Guidebooks - The Whistleblower House].

Support may come from a lawyer, union, trusted colleague, counsellor, civil-society organisation, medical practitioner, faith community, or others. The use of in-house psychosocial support providers contracted by the employer should be approached after careful assessment of confidentiality protections offered.

Seeking support is not weakness, but an important part of protection and self-recovery.

4.9 Family, dignity, and long-term impact

Whistleblowing often affects more than the person who makes the disclosure. Financial interruption, stress, social stigma, and uncertainty can affect children, partners, and dependants [Hyperlink Paper 3].

That is why success should not be measured only by whether a case is won. A person may succeed legally and still endure profound socio-economic and psychological harm. Protection should therefore be understood more broadly, to include recovery, reintegration, and dignity, not only formal legal remedy.

4.10 Can a whistleblower withdraw a complaint?

In practice, some whistleblowers do try to withdraw, step back, or disengage from a complaint. This may happen because of fear, fatigue, family pressure, financial strain, settlement, distrust, or concern about personal safety.

Whether a matter can be "withdrawn" fully depends on the forum and the nature of the issue. An employer may continue internal process. A regulator may continue investigating. Criminal matters may proceed independently of the complainant's wishes. Public reporting may also already have placed aspects of the matter in the public domain.

Withdrawal of a disclosure does not automatically end risk. In some situations, it may reduce exposure.

In others, retaliation may continue, or institutions may press ahead regardless. If a person is considering withdrawal, it is wise to seek advice first about the likely consequences.

4.11 Practical options after disclosure

The available options will depend on the facts, but may include internal escalation where safe, labour remedies, unfair dismissal or unfair labour practice routes, attempts to halt harmful process, harassment protections, witness-protection pathways in limited criminal contexts, and support from civil-society organisations.

Settlement may also arise. It can reduce cost and stress, but it involves trade-offs and should be considered carefully with advice.

4.12 Recovery, reintegration and repair

Protection should not end once the immediate crisis has passed. Some whistleblowers will need longer-term support, including counselling, livelihood rebuilding, legal follow-through, reintegration into work, or support for family recovery.

A humane whistleblowing framework must think beyond disclosure and beyond punishment. It must also ask what it takes for a person to recover a sense of dignity, stability, and future.

Support after disclosure may involve more than one kind of help

Legal	Psychological	Financial	Workplace	Family	Safety	Civil Society

Whistleblowing is often described as an act of courage. In practice, it is also a process of judgement, preparation, and endurance. The steps in this part of the Guide cannot identify and remove every risk, but they support clearer thinking, reduce the likelihood of avoidable mistakes, and help with preparation for the reality that disclosure may trigger both formal and informal consequences.

PART 3 | PROTECTION AND REFORM

Protecting courage: support, standards, reform and resources

Whistleblowing does not happen in isolation. It is shaped by the institutions that receive disclosures, the laws that protect or fail to protect whistleblowers, the organisations that respond, the media that report, and the public culture that either stigmatises or values integrity. If South Africa wants more people to speak up safely, it is not enough to ask individuals to be brave. The wider system must become more trustworthy, more coordinated, and more humane [Accountability Paper].

Protecting courage requires more than one actor

CHAPTER 5

What stronger protection should look like

At present, South Africa's whistleblower system is still too fragmented. [Literature Review, and Accountability Paper] The law offers some protection, but disclosure often triggers retaliation faster than support. Institutions do not always communicate well with one another. Internal systems are often mistrusted. Whistleblowers and their families bear heavy costs.

A stronger protection system would begin before serious harm has already occurred. It would not rely mainly on litigation after the fact. It would provide clear reporting channels, stronger confidentiality protections, coordinated investigation pathways, and support that reflects the real harms whistleblowers face in practice.

A credible protection system needs to be broader than labour law alone. It should include legal support, psychosocial support, safer reporting systems, practical security planning, and some form of longer-term reintegration or reparation where harm has already occurred.

It should also be more independent. Internal systems matter, but they are not enough where organisations are defensive, captured, or more concerned with reputation than accountability.

A stronger system would also measure success differently. It would ask not only whether policies exist, but whether whistleblowers are safer, supported, and able to recover afterwards.

Protecting whistleblowers properly means moving from symbolic protection to practical protection. It means building a system that does not simply admire courage after the fact but actively reduces the cost of speaking up in the first place.

CHAPTER 6

African, regional and international standards: what good practice looks like

South Africa does not have to start from scratch. Across Africa and internationally, there is growing recognition that whistleblower protection must go beyond narrow employment remedies and formal reporting rules. Stronger systems increasingly combine legal safeguards with independent reporting channels, confidentiality protections, support services, public education, and clearer institutional accountability.

At the international level, anti-corruption standards recognise the importance of protecting people who report corruption-related wrongdoing in good faith and on reasonable grounds [Paper 3]. At regional level, African and SADC anti-corruption instruments also point toward protection for informants and witnesses.

Comparative practice suggests several recurring features of stronger systems:

- independent or centralised reporting and protection functions.
- clearer confidentiality and anonymity rules.
- protection that begins earlier in the disclosure pathway.
- financial, psychosocial, and legal support.
- public education and culture change.
- stronger enforcement against retaliation.

What a stronger law could look like

Reform Area	Current Law	Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DOJCD) Discussion Document: Proposed Reform[3]
Definitions	Applies to "employees" and "workers" in formal employment; disclosure defined narrowly	Broader clearer definitions including contractors, interns, volunteers, and wider categories of wrongdoing
Confidentiality and Anonymity	Confidentiality is recognised but anonymity is not strongly supported; practical anonymity often difficult	Stronger confidentiality rules and explicit support for anonymous disclosures, with secure reporting channels

3 **Note:** This table reflects selected reform issues and good-practice proposals that informed South Africa's broader whistleblower reform debate. It should not be read as a summary of the Protected Disclosures Bill, 2026.

Protection against Retaliation	Prohibits "occupational detriment" (e.g. dismissal, harassment, victimisation) but enforcement is weak	Expanded safeguards against dismissal, harassment, and subtle workplace retaliation, with clearer remedies.
Witness Protection Alignment	Whistleblower protection and witness protection operate separately	Greater integration with witness-protection measures, including safety planning and relocation support
Timing of Protection	Protection applies once disclosure is formally made	Earlier protection during preparation and reporting stages, recognising risks before disclosure
Holistic Support	Limited institutional support; remedies employment-related	More comprehensive assistance, including psychosocial support, legal aid, and in certain proposals, support for families. (South African Law Reform Commission (SALRC), *Project 123: Protected Disclosures and Whistleblower Protection - SALRC publications: justice.gov.za)*.
Institutional Reforms	Fragmented reporting to several institutions with differing powers and jurisdictions	The proposal for a dedicated agency is supported by comparative best practice and received wide support at a conference hosted by the Presidency on whistleblowing. Presidential Whistleblowing Conference, 2025 https://www.presidency.gov.za/sites/default/files/2025-09/Appendix%20M%20-%20Whistleblower%20Protection%20%20Final%20Conference%20Report.pdf

For South African whistleblowers and practitioners, the key point is not to copy another country's model word for word. It is to understand the direction of good practice. Good protection is practical, coordinated, people-centred, and realistic about power.

International and regional standards also matter because South African courts may sometimes have regard to them when interpreting domestic law.

CHAPTER 7

Reform in South Africa: what may be changing

South Africa is no longer only in a period of reform discussion. At the time of finalising this Guide, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development had released the Protected Disclosures Bill, 2026 for public comment[4]. The Bill is not yet law. Until any reform is enacted and brought into operation, the existing PDA remains the applicable framework governing protected disclosures.

Another important near-term development is the forthcoming South African Whistleblowing Code of Practice. If well designed and effectively implemented, it could help translate broad legal principle into clearer workplace standards on reporting channels, confidentiality, fair handling of disclosures, and organisational response. Its significance lies not only in compliance, but in its potential to strengthen cultures of trust, ethics, and integrity in the environments where many whistleblowers first seek help.

Current law and proposed reform: keeping the difference clear

In practice this means that while reform efforts to support whistleblowing are ongoing, the proposed reforms are not yet law. Until reforms are enacted, the current law applies to whistleblowing, and it remains vital that one seeks advice early.

There are real signs that South Africa is moving toward stronger whistleblower protection. Since the substantive drafting of this Guide, South Africa's whistleblower reform process has moved from policy discussion to a draft Bill published for public comment. But reform processes take time, and proposed law is not yet protection in hand. Until change is enacted, careful preparation, early advice, and realistic expectations remain essential.

CHAPTER 8

Who has a role to play?

Whistleblower protection cannot be carried by whistleblowers alone. It depends on what institutions, employers, professionals, and the wider public choose to do when concerns are raised.

Employers and leadership

Employers should treat disclosures as governance information, not only as reputational threats. They should invest in credible speak-up systems, independent ethics capacity, confidentiality safeguards, and fair process. Where harm has already occurred, they should take communication, counselling, reintegration, and dignity restoration seriously.

4 At the time of finalising this Guide, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, *Invitation for Public Comments: Protected Disclosures Bill, 2026* (9 April 2026). The Department invited written comments by 14 May 2026. The invitation states that the draft Bill was prepared having regard to the Zondo Commission recommendations, the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council report, international instruments and foreign jurisdictions. While the Bill contains several positive protection reforms, it may be subject to further revision and until it is law, the current PDA remains in force.

Employers should also remember that internal investigations and whistleblowing concerns may feed into wider governance and reporting processes. In the public sector, organs of state operate within oversight relationships that may include reporting to Parliament or parliamentary committees. In the private sector, companies may have duties to report to boards, audit committees, regulators, and, in some circumstances, shareholders. These reporting duties do not remove the need to protect confidentiality carefully. Organisations should therefore be explicit about how whistleblower identity and sensitive information will be managed in governance, compliance, and statutory reporting processes.

HR and ethics officers

HR can play a key role, but trust cannot be assumed. Where HR is perceived as aligned mainly with management, internal systems lose credibility. Independent ethics structures, or at least clearly separated and well-trained reporting pathways, are therefore important.

Parliament and government

Government and Parliament shape the legal architecture, but they also carry a wider duty: to ensure that reforms are not symbolic, that institutions coordinate properly, and that whistleblower voices are heard in reform processes.

Oversight is essential, but oversight must be designed in a way that does not casually expose whistleblowers. Institutions should be able to account upward without needlessly disclosing identities or sensitive details that increase risk.

Civil society and media

Civil-society organisations help fill crucial gaps in legal, psychosocial, and advocacy support. Journalists and media organisations may amplify disclosures and help expose wrongdoing that would otherwise remain hidden. But both operate best when ethics, source protection, informed consent, and careful strategy are taken seriously.

Trade unions, professional bodies and the public

Trade unions can support workers facing retaliation. Professional bodies can shape ethical norms. Public discourse matters too. If whistleblowers are routinely treated as traitors, opportunists, or disruptions to be managed, silence will continue to seem safer than disclosure.

Stakeholder roles / ecosystem action

Who should do, what?

Stakeholder	Illustrative Key Responsibility and Action Pathways
CSO Pathways	• Develop coordinated advocacy strategies targeting specific legislative, policy, and institutional reforms. • Consider strategic litigation to test, clarify, and expand whistleblower protections. • Collaborate with other civil society actors to provide immediate legal, psychosocial, security, and financial support to whistleblowers while systemic reforms are pursued. • Commission and disseminate research addressing priority gaps shown through empirical findings, including family-level harm, reintegration, and long-term socio-economic impacts.
Government	• Strengthening law, coordinating protection, resource institutions, data collection and monitoring • Shift evaluation metrics from outputs (policies adopted) to outcomes (whistleblower safety, wellbeing, and reintegration). • Recognise current protection failures as both a governance and moral crisis.
Parliament	Prioritise reform, oversee implementation, hear whistleblower voices
Judiciary, Regulatory and Enforcement Authorities	Recognise sophisticated retaliation patterns, apply protection robustly
Employers	Treat disclosures as governance information, review and strengthen processes, raise awareness and support cultural shifts toward promotion and protection of whistleblowers, prevent retaliation
Whistleblowers Featured in Research	• Provide each whistleblower with feedback. • Connect whistleblowers with relevant and available support resources within the civil society ecosystem. • Explore opportunities to amplify whistleblower voices in reform and accountability processes. • Adopt trauma, ethics centered methodologies

Media & the Public	• Acknowledge that incremental reforms are insufficient and that fundamental system redesign is needed. • Centre whistleblower voices and lived experience in all reform and implementation processes. • Treat whistleblower protection as essential democratic infrastructure requiring sustained political and financial investment. • Report ethically, protect sources, avoid unnecessary exposure, sustain reporting to promote awareness
Public/professional bodies	Reduce stigma, support integrity, scrutinize processes and systems, challenge silence

Stronger protection depends on shared responsibility. A healthy whistleblowing environment is built not only by law, but by ethical leadership, trusted institutions, public support, and practical solidarity.

CHAPTER 9

Key resources and referral pathways

A guide cannot replace tailored advice. Every disclosure depends on its facts, the identity of those involved, the route chosen, and the kinds of risk that may arise. For that reason, this Guide is best used as a starting point for judgement and awareness, not as a substitute for legal, psychosocial, or security advice where these are needed.

Support is often needed in layers rather than from a sole source. A person may need legal advice, emotional support, workplace representation, safety planning, anti-corruption reporting options, or media guidance at various stages of the process. Those needs may also change over time. For that reason, the directory below should be read as a set of possible starting points and referral pathways, not as a fixed sequence or a complete solution in itself.

Legal advice and representation

In some cases, early legal advice can make a significant difference. It may help a whistleblower or prospective whistleblower assess whether a disclosure is likely to qualify for legal protection, understand possible workplace or legal consequences, preserve evidence, and make more informed decisions about timing, reporting routes, confidentiality, and personal risk. Legal assistance may also become important for the protection of rights after retaliation has begun, for example where there is suspension, disciplinary action, dismissal, intimidation, harassment, or other occupational detriment. A more detailed South African Guide on whistleblower legal protection and representation is available from PPLAAF and may be consulted alongside this Guide. (PPLAAF)

Organisations providing free legal assistance or representation often apply eligibility criteria before deciding whether they can assist. This may include a means test, an assessment of the merits of the matter, and whether the issue falls within the organisation's mandate or capacity. Legal Aid South Africa states that it performs a means assess to determine whether a person qualifies for assistance, and the University of Pretoria Law Clinic similarly notes that a client must pass a means test, the matter must have sufficient merits, and it must be a type of matter the clinic deals with. (Legal Aid South Africa)

In addition to public-interest and community-based legal services, some larger commercial law firms maintain dedicated pro bono units and may, in appropriate cases, take on matters in the public interest or involving vulnerable clients.

Referral Pathways

Organisation	What it may help with	Practical Note
Legal Aid South Africa (LASA) **https://legal-aid.co.za/** (Legal Aid South Africa) Offices in all provinces	May provide legal advice and legal representation to people who cannot afford it, subject to its mandate, qualifying criteria, and means test.	Not every matter will qualify, and financial eligibility rules apply. Seek help as early as possible, especially if dismissal, disciplinary action, or other retaliation is already under way. (Legal Aid South Africa) Complaint forms are available online. T: 0800 110 110 SMS: 079 835 71 79
ProBono.Org https://probono.org.za/ Head Office: Gauteng, Johannesburg	May assist with access to civil legal help for indigent and vulnerable people through a clearing-house model, advice, referrals, and placement of suitable matters with pro bono legal practitioners. (ProBono.org)	Assistance is not automatic in every matter. Provides a potential entry point for advice, screening, referral, or placement, particularly where cost is a barrier. T: 011 339 6080 E: info@probono.org.za
University Law Clinics	University law clinics may provide free or low-cost legal assistance, advice, and sometimes representation to indigent or vulnerable members of the public, depending on the clinic's mandate, capacity, and the nature of the matter. (University of Pretoria)	Assistance is not automatic. Clinics apply a means test, assess the merits of the matter, and only accept matters that fall within their areas of work. It is best to treat a law clinic as a possible access point for advice, screening, referral, or representation where private legal services are not affordable. (University of Pretoria)

Larger Commercial Law Firms with pro bono practices	Dedicated internal pro bono units which may in appropriate cases assist with public-interest, rights-based, or strategic matters, or provide referrals through pro bono clearing mechanisms.	Assistance is discretionary and usually not available in every matter.
Legal Practice Council (LPC) HO in Gauteng Provincial offices	Regulatory and complaints body for the legal profession rather than a general legal advice service. May help members of the public identify legal practitioners and firms, and lodge complaints about attorneys, advocates, candidate legal practitioners, or professional conduct.	Useful where the concern relates to the conduct of a legal practitioner, or where professional standing needs to be verified. It is generally not the first port of call for substantive advice on a whistleblowing matter itself. T: +27 (0) 10 001 8500 E: info@lpc.org.za

For more detailed guidance on legal protection, legal representation, and practical legal considerations, both the South Africa Whistleblower Protection Guidebook published by PPLAAF and the Legal Guidebook for Whistleblowers published by the Whistleblower House may be consulted. (PPLAAF; The Whistleblower House)

Need help urgently? Start here:

- seek legal or other trusted advice as early as possible.
- document concerns and any signs of retaliation.
- use safer communication channels and protect sensitive information.
- avoid assuming that anonymity, confidentiality, or institutional support will automatically be preserved; and
- decide first what kind of help is most urgently needed: legal, emotional, workplace, financial, or safety related.

The most crucial point is that support may need to come from more than one place. Legal, emotional, financial, workplace, and personal safety needs often overlap. Early, careful engagement with the right support can make a meaningful difference.

This Guide is one contribution of the Protecting and Promoting Whistleblowing in South Africa (PPW) project to that wider ecosystem. Drawing on the project's research, dialogue, advocacy and engagement with whistleblowers, practitioners and support stakeholders, it seeks to translate learning into a practical resource that can support more informed decisions, safer reporting, better institutional responses and stronger referral pathways. In doing so, the Guide aims to complement the work of existing organisations and help strengthen a more coordinated, humane and accountable whistleblowing environment in South Africa.

RESOURCES DIRECTORY

Legal Advice and Representation

Legal Aid South Africa (LASA) – Johannesburg (HO), Gauteng, offices in all provinces

Provides legal advice and legal representation in qualifying matters for people who cannot afford private legal services, subject to mandate, means testing and other eligibility criteria.

Website: https://legal-aid.co.za/

Contact: Tel: 0800 110 110 | SMS: 079 835 71 79 | Complaint forms available online.

ProBono.Org – Johannesburg (HO), Gauteng

Provides access to civil legal assistance for indigent and vulnerable people through advice, referrals, screening and placement of suitable matters with pro bono legal practitioners.

Website: https://probono.org.za/

Contact: Tel: 011 339 6080 | Email: info@probono.org.za.

University Law Clinics – various universities across South Africa

Provide free or low-cost legal advice and, in some cases, legal representation, depending on the clinic's mandate, capacity, means test and assessment of the merits of the matter.

Website: Varies by institution.

Contact: Varies by clinic.

Larger commercial law firms with pro bono practices – various

May provide pro bono legal assistance in selected public-interest, rights-based or strategic matters, or may refer matters through pro bono clearing mechanisms.

Website: Varies by firm.

Contact: Varies by firm. Assistance is discretionary and not available in every matter.

Legal Practice Council (LPC) – South Africa (HO) Gauteng; provincial offices

Provides regulation of the legal profession, complaints processes, and practitioner verification. It is relevant where concerns relate to the conduct of a legal practitioner or where professional standing needs to be verified.

Website: https://lpc.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 (0)10 001 8500 | Email: info@lpc.org.za.

Independent Oversight and Investigatory Bodies

National Portfolio Committees – Cape Town, Western Cape

Provide parliamentary oversight of government departments and may be relevant for accountability, public submissions and engagement with legislative oversight processes.

Website: https://www.parliament.gov.za/committee-details/275

Contact: Lindiwe Ntsabo, Committee Secretary | Tel: 021 403 8230 | Mobile: 083 709 8524 | Email: lntsabo@parliament.gov.za.

Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA) – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides independent audit oversight of government departments and public institutions to promote accountability and sound financial management.

Website: https://www.agsa.co.za/

The Presidency – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides executive leadership and may be relevant in relation to national governance, anti-corruption coordination and referrals.

Website: https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/

Contact: Toll-free: 17737 | E-fax: 086 681 0987 | Email: president@presidency.gov.za.

Public Protector South Africa – Pretoria (HO), Gauteng, and provincial offices

Provides investigation of maladministration, abuse of power and improper conduct in state affairs. It may receive protected disclosures and investigate systemic wrongdoing in public administration.

Website: https://www.pprotect.org/

Contact: Tel: +27 (0)12 366 7000 | Toll-free: 0800 112 040 | Email: registration2@pprotect.org.

South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) – Johannesburg (HO), Gauteng, and provincial offices

Provides complaints handling, advocacy and referrals in matters involving human rights violations. It may be relevant where whistleblowing concerns intersect with rights violations, discrimination or abuse.

Website: https://www.sahrc.org.za/

Contact: Complaints portal: https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/lodge-complaints | Tel: 011 877 3600.

Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) – Pretoria, Gauteng, and provincial offices

Provides investigation of certain complaints involving the police and may be relevant where whistleblowing concerns involve police misconduct.

Website: https://www.ipid.gov.za

Contact: Email: complaints@ipid.gov.za.

Public Service Commission / Public Service Anti-Corruption Hotline – South Africa (national)

Provides a corruption-reporting hotline and integrity referral mechanism for public service corruption concerns.

Website: www.publicservicecorruptionhotline.org.za

Contact: Free call: 0800 701 701 | Free fax: 0800 204 965 | Email: integrity@publicservicecorruptionhotline.org.za.

Civil Society

Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-SA) – Zimbabwe

Provides anti-corruption advocacy and community empowerment support, including reporting and legal-action support.

Website: https://uncaccoalition.org/anti-corruption-trust-of-southern-africa-act-sa/

Contact: Tel: +263 (0)55 2525235 | Email: actsouthernafrica@gmail.com.

Campaign on Digital Ethics – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides advocacy on digital ethics and digital-rights issues, which may be useful where surveillance, digital security or data misuse arise.

Website: https://www.code-sa.org/

Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides legal research, advocacy and public-interest support on human rights and governance matters.

Website: https://www.wits.ac.za/cals/

Contact: Tel: +27 11 717 8600 | Email: info@cals.wits.ac.za.

Corruption Watch – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides corruption reporting channels, public-interest advocacy and awareness support on corruption in the public and private sectors.

Website: https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/

Contact: WhatsApp: 082 579 5220 | Tel: 011 242 3900 | Hotline: 0800 023456 | Online reporting: https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/report-corruption/.

Courage Hub SA – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides psychosocial support, storytelling platforms and public education relevant to whistleblowers and others under pressure.

Website: https://www.couragehubsa.org

Contact: Tel: +27 60 349 0744 | Email: info@couragehubsa.org.

Freedom Under Law – Western Cape

Provides public-interest legal advocacy and litigation support in matters involving constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

Website: https://www.freedomunderlaw.org.za

Legal Resources Centre (LRC) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides public-interest legal support and advocacy on rights-based and accountability matters.

Website: https://lrc.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 11 038 9709 | Email: info@lrc.org.za.

Lifeline Johannesburg – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides confidential counselling and crisis support, which may be useful where disclosure or retaliation creates emotional distress or crisis.

Website: https://lifelinejhb.org.za

Contact: Tel: 0861 322 322 (24/7 crisis line) | WhatsApp booking available via website.

Open Democracy Advice Centre (ODAC) – Cape Town, Western Cape

Provides advocacy, awareness, legal advice, support and case referral on whistleblowing, access to information and privacy-related matters.

Website: https://opendemocracy.org.za/

Contact: Toll-free helpline: 0800 52 53 52 | Mobile helpline: 060 643 4355 | Email: helpline@odac.org.za

Open Secrets – Cape Town, Western Cape

Provides investigative research and advocacy on corruption, illicit financial flows and accountability.

Website: https://www.opensecrets.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 21 447 2701 (office) | Mobile: +27 72 565 0173 | Email: researcher@opensecrets.org.za

Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides anti-corruption advocacy and reporting pathways relating to misuse of public resources and related wrongdoing.

Website: https://www.outa.co.za/

Contact: Tel: 087 170 0639 | Online corruption reporting: https://outa.whispli.com/inbox/register?channel=a0e91702-4b87-11ec-967e-9ae0f4795a24&page=85f85eb0-8e3c-11ec-9092-d671547026d2&locale=en#refresh.

Right2Know – Cape Town, Western Cape

Provides advocacy on access to information, transparency and accountability.

Website: https://theright2know.org/

Contact: Tel: +27 73 555 6455 | Email: ngaziningidi@gmail.com.

South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides counselling and crisis support for people experiencing trauma, stress, anxiety or related mental-health difficulties.

Website: https://www.sadag.org

Contact: Mental Health Helpline: 0800 21 22 23 | SMS: 31393 | Email: info@sadag.org.

Section27 – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides legal and policy advocacy to protect and promote constitutional rights.

Website: https://section27.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 (0)11 356 4100 | Email: info@section27.org.za.

The Whistleblower House – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides psychosocial support, legal guidance and advocacy for whistleblowers, with a focus on ethics, democracy and practical support gaps.

Website: https://whistleblowerhouse.org.za

Contact: Tel: +27 (0)10 446 9900 | Email: info@whistleblowerhouse.org.za.

Whistleblower Support Platform for Reform (WSPR) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides a collaborative civil-society platform aimed at improving support systems, collaboration and reform for whistleblowers.

Website: https://wspr.org.za/

Contact: Email: info@wspr.org.za | Contact form available on the website.

Key Public Bodies, Hotlines and Reporting Mechanisms

General government anti-corruption mechanism – South Africa (national)

Provides a national anti-corruption hotline for reporting corruption.

Website: [not specified in the draft]

Contact: Anti-corruption hotline: 0800 43 43 73.

Anti-Corruption Task Team (ACTT) – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides coordination of corruption investigations and prosecutions across multiple state agencies.

Website: https://www.gov.za/AntiCorruptionTaskTeam

South African Police Service (SAPS) – Head office: Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides law-enforcement services and may be relevant where criminal conduct needs to be reported.

Website: www.saps.gov.za

Special Investigating Unit (SIU) – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides investigation of corruption, maladministration and fraud in government.

Website: https://www.siu.org.za/

Contact: Whistleblower hotline: 0800 037 774 | Email: siu@whistleblowing.co.za.

National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) / Be Honest platform – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides prosecution of criminal matters and a reporting channel through the Be Honest platform.

Website: www.behonest.co.za

Contact: Toll-free: 0800 212 580 | Email: ndpp@npa.gov.za | id-leads@npa.gov.za | npa@behonest.co.za

Department of Justice and Constitutional Development – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides justice-sector oversight and law-development functions.

Website: https://www.justice.gov.za/

Contact: National toll-free hotline: 0800 701 701.

Anti-Corruption Hotline – Public Service – South Africa (national)

Provides a dedicated public-service corruption reporting hotline and referral mechanism.

Website: www.publicservicecorruptionhotline.org.za

Contact: Hotline: 0800 701 701 | Email: Integrity@publicservicecorruptionhotline.org.za | Free Fax: 0800 204 965.

National Health System – South Africa

Provides an ethics reporting line.

Contact: Ethics line: 14 144 14.

Department of Home Affairs – South Africa

Provides a counter-corruption contact point for Home Affairs matters.

Contact: Counter-Corruption Unit: 012 406 4318.

Department of Human Settlements – South Africa

Provides a fraud hotline.

Contact: Fraud hotline: 0800 204 401.

National Treasury – South Africa

Provides a contact point for phishing scams and related concerns.

Contact: Email: csd@treasury.gov.za | Tel: 012 406 9222.

South African Revenue Service (SARS) – South Africa

Provides a fraud and anti-corruption hotline.

South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) – South Africa

Provides a grant and fraud hotline.

Contact: Hotline: 0800 60 10 11.

Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) National Anti-Corruption Unit – South Africa

Provides a corruption-reporting line in the road-traffic management sector.

Contact: 0861 400 800 (not toll free).

Government Employees Pension Fund – South Africa

Provides an anti-corruption hotline.

Contact: Anti-corruption hotline: 0800 43 43 73.

Municipal Ombuds Offices (not present in all municipalities) – local government level

Provide municipal-level complaints handling and accountability support in municipalities where an ombud office exists.

Website: Varies by municipality; for example the City of Johannesburg: https://joburgombudsman.org.za/

Contact: Johannesburg Ombudsman example: WhatsApp 081 365 0225 | Email: complaints@joburgombudsman.org.za.

Gauteng Ethics and Integrity Unit – Gauteng

Provides provincial ethics and integrity reporting mechanisms.

Website: https://www.thehotline.co.za/ | Web app: www.thehotlineapp.co.za

Contact: Tel: 011 403 1114 | Toll-free from landline: 080 1111 633 | SMS call-back: 072 595 9139 | Email: gpethics@thehotline.co.za | Fax-to-email: 086 726 1681.

Western Cape Forensic Investigation Unit – Cape Town, Western Cape

Provides forensic investigations and a reporting channel for fraud, theft and corruption in the province.

Website: https://www.westerncape.gov.za/report-fraud-theft-and-corruption | Web app: www.thehotlineapp.co.za

Contact: Tel: 021 483 0931 | Email: tip.offs@westerncape.gov.za | Fax-to-email: 086 726 1681.

Media and journalism

amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides investigative journalism and may be relevant where carefully managed public-interest media engagement is being considered.

Website: https://amabhungane.org/

Contact: Tip-offs contact page: https://amabhungane.org/contact/#.

Daily Maverick – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides journalism and public-interest reporting, including investigative reporting and tip-off channels.

Website: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/

Contact: Online tip-offs: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/tipoffs/?utm_source=contact-us.

Media Monitoring Africa – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides media-monitoring, ethical journalism support and media-freedom advocacy.

Website: https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/

Contact: Tel: 011 788 1278 | Email: info@mma.org.za.

Advisory, Regulatory and Professional Bodies

Institute of Risk Management South Africa (IRMSA) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides support on risk-management practice and governance.

Website: https://www.irmsa.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 (0)11 555 1800 | Email: complaints@irmsa.org.za.

National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council – Pretoria, Gauteng

Provides national anti-corruption policy advice and coordination support.

Website: https://anticorruption.gov.za/contactus

Contact: Tel: 012 300 5200 | Email: nacac@presidency.gov.za.

National Business Initiative (NBI) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides business-focused support on corporate accountability and governance.

Website: https://www.nbi.org.za/

Contact: Tel: +27 (11) 544 6000 | Email: info@nbi.org.za.

South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) – Johannesburg, Gauteng

Provides professional regulation and support for chartered accountants in ethical financial practice.

Website: https://www.saica.org.za/

Contact: Tel: 08610 SAICA (72422) or 011 621 6600.

CONCLUSION

Whistleblowers are often asked to carry the burden of accountability on behalf of society. This Guide has argued that they should not be left to carry that burden alone. Stronger protection requires better laws, better institutions, better workplace cultures, and stronger support networks. It also requires honesty: honesty about the risks, the limits of current law, and the practical importance of advice, documentation, support, and reform.

Protecting courage means more than praising it. It means building a country in which speaking up in the public interest does not predictably lead to harm, isolation, or ruin.

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