



PHI SIGMA SIGMA

Once, Always.

Ritual Lawsuit

Frequently Asked Questions – Confidential/Do Not Distribute

1. What is this lawsuit all about?

Phi Sigma Sigma learned in 2012 that a portion of our confidential ritual was posted anonymously on a public online message board. The website owners have refused repeated requests to remove the post or to reveal the identity of the person who posted it.

We hold our ritual to be sacred, and will not stand idly by while it is publicly distributed and/or disparaged. We have, therefore, initiated legal action to reveal the identity of the anonymous poster, so that we may directly demand the removal of the post and hold that person accountable by all means at our disposal.

2. Are we suing the website that has our ritual online?

No. We are suing the person who posted on that website. As part of the discovery phase of the lawsuit, we will seek to have the website owners legally compelled to reveal his/her identity to us.

3. Is all of our ritual online? Is it accurate?

No, it is not all online, and no, it is not wholly accurate.

4. Then why bother with the lawsuit?

Our ritual is an essential and sacred part of our organization, and we, as members, take a solemn oath to protect its secrecy. Our ritual serves as the foundation for the shared experience that binds us together as sisters, and we believe that there is value in protecting that shared experience. In order to legally maintain the confidentiality of our ritual, we must actively protect it.

This principle of “protect it or lose it” applies not only to our confidential ritual and secrets, but also to our intellectual property, copyrights, and trademarks. Having an active licensing program is one way we actively protect our trademarks, such as our name, our Greek letters, and our symbols. This lawsuit is one way to actively protect our ritual, so that we don’t lose our legal rights to claim our ritual as secret, and ours and ours alone.

5. Where else is our ritual posted online?

Since the original post was made, several websites have re-posted the information. We have been successful through legal means in having almost all of those re-posts removed. It has become clear, however, that without taking more assertive legal action, we will severely limit our ability to compel sites to remove posts about our ritual. If we don't actively protect our ritual now, we may lose our rights to claim ritual as ours – forever. We hope that through this lawsuit, we will have the authority to have any remaining and future posts also removed.

6. Now that a portion of our ritual may be illegally publicized, would we consider changing ritual?

No.

7. Why won't the website take down the post?

We can't speak on behalf of the website owners regarding their motivations. We are hopeful that through this legal action, they will be required to take down the post.

8. Who posted it?

We aim to discover the identity of the person who originally posted the information through this lawsuit.

9. What do we hope will be the outcome of this lawsuit?

Our ultimate goal is to have all posts related to our ritual removed as soon as possible.

10. What is this lawsuit costing Phi Sigma Sigma? What other programs/services are going to suffer because we are re-allocating these funds towards lawyers?

Phi Sigma Sigma budgets for legal fees annually, and, knowing this issue existed during our last budget cycle, we included the anticipated cost of litigation in the budget. Supreme Council is committed to ensuring our members and chapters continue to receive the high level of service they expect. Normal chapter and member services will not be impacted.

11. How much is Phi Sigma Sigma willing to spend to get the post taken down? How far are you willing to go?

Our ritual is an essential and sacred part of our organization. We are ready and willing to avail ourselves of any and all resources and means to protect its secrecy.



12. What are the possible outcomes of this lawsuit?

There are several possible outcomes, where we either learn of the identity of the poster or not. It is our hope that regardless of outcome, these legal proceedings will give us the legal authority to compel the removal of the information. Our number one priority is to have the posts removed. Should the person who posted the information online be a member, we may also pursue membership action for breaking the Oath of Fealty and Sisterhood (through which every sister pledges to keep the ritual secret and sacred).

13. When do we think the post will finally be taken down?

Legal action has already been initiated. While it is difficult to predict how long legal proceedings take, our goal is to have this resolved as quickly as possible.

14. Why did Phi Sigma Sigma leadership wait so long after the post to initiate legal action?

Phi Sigma Sigma learned about the post in 2012. Initial attempts to have the information removed were unsuccessful. Because a lawsuit is a serious commitment of resources, the Supreme Council elected in 2013 was fully educated on the matter. In addition, the Fraternity wanted to exhaust all other avenues to have the post removed before resorting to legal action. Phi Sigma Sigma has now done so, and legal action is the next step.

15. Why does it matter that our ritual is online? Isn't it the experience of initiation and of sisterhood that really binds us together, not just the words?

Our ritual is an essential and sacred part of our organization, and we as members take a solemn oath to protect its secrecy. Our ritual serves as the foundation for the shared experience that binds us together as sisters, and we believe that there is value in protecting that shared experience. In order to legally maintain the confidentiality of our ritual, we must actively protect it. This lawsuit is one way to seek that protection.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Executive Director Michelle Ardern directly at 410-799-1224 or protectritual@phisigmasigma.org.

