

PHI MU ALPHA SINFONIA FRATERNITY

Statement of Position on Probate Shows

Probate shows are an integral part of student life at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia recognizes that the participation of chapters in this tradition can have significant impact on the creation and maintenance of fraternal spirit and a positive reputation among the student body.

Probate shows are a tradition that originated in historically Black fraternities and sororities, stemming from African rites of passage. Beginning in the early 1960s, chapters of these organizations began to culminate the conclusion of their pledging activities with a public performance. In the first years of such performances, they generally “reflected popular culture and showcased the talent of new members who sang and danced similar to the groups of that era.” But by the mid-1960s, stepping began to be more heavily incorporated, and the shows continued to evolve in the decades that followed into the complex styles and traditions of today’s performances.*

Despite the generally positive nature of this practice, some Sinfonia chapters have violated the Fraternity’s *Policy on Hazing* in the rehearsal of probate shows. Additionally, some chapters have cited probate show preparation as a legitimizing rationale for implementing forced calisthenics in a number of hazing cases. Neither probate shows nor their rehearsals can be permitted to violate any provisions of the policy on hazing. However well intentioned, activities violating policy must be met with full investigation and, when applicable, discipline in accordance with the Fraternity’s *Protocols for Alleged Violations of Risk Management Policies*.

In an effort to provide guidance that will enable the successful and positive continuation of the tradition of probate shows, the National Executive Committee has developed the following policies to govern the practice of preparing for and performing a probate show.

The policy that follows is a challenging burden to meet, and any chapter wishing to undertake a probate show accepts significant responsibility and will be held to a very high standard of compliance with regard to these policies.

Policy Governing the Preparation and Performance of a Probate Show

- **Participation in the probate show must be truly optional for probationary members.**

Because participation in the probate show often requires physically taxing activities which are not themselves required for membership in the Fraternity at-large, probationary members must have the choice of whether to participate or not. This is a particularly difficult standard to meet, in that it is the probationary member’s perception of a requirement, rather than an outright statement to that effect, that determines compliance. Any pressure or coercion to participate in the show will not be permitted.

* Kimbrough, Walter M. *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities*. 2003. pp. 111-146.

- **Should probationary members be unable or unwilling to perform the more physically taxing aspects of the show, they must be given alternate opportunities for involvement, but this involvement must remain truly optional.**

Methods of compliance with this requirement include, but are not limited to, allowing a probationary member to participate in selected portions of the show or to participate in non-performance aspects of the show (scheduling with university officials, admission, logistics, etc.).

- **The chapter may not conduct or organize exercise sessions of the probationary members, nor may it require or coerce probationary members to exercise individually.**

The probate show and its rehearsals may not be used as justification for a physical conditioning program. If the performance routine is too physically challenging for probationary members to perform with a reasonable number of rehearsals, then the routine must be simplified.

- **Rehearsals must abide by the following limitations:**

- Rehearsals must consist only of reasonable warm-up activities and the performance routine itself. Furthermore, activities commonly known to be physical conditioning (e.g. calisthenics) may not occur in the performance routine, nor may any activity that otherwise violates Fraternity policy.
- Rehearsals must be held at reasonable hours.
- Rehearsals must include sufficient breaks at reasonable intervals.
- The tone of the rehearsal must be positive, not degrading or unnecessarily intimidating.

- **Physical conditioning exercises may not be used as a punishment for anything, including inability to perform the steps, songs and activities contained within the probate show routine or any aspect of the probationary membership period.**

- **Rehearsal schedules, content and plans for compliance with this policy must be included in the written probationary membership program and submitted to the province governor in accordance with the *Policy on Probationary Membership Program Documentation Submission*. In accordance with this policy, the rehearsal schedule and content must be approved by the province governor prior to implementation.**

The Commission on Standards determines whether this policy, or any other policy, has been violated. When in doubt, members should seek the advance guidance of their province governor and the National Headquarters staff. Chapters violating the provisions of this policy or any other policy, including the *Risk Management Policies*, will be subject to investigation in accordance with the *Protocols for Alleged Violations of Risk Management Policies* and, if appropriate, disciplined in accordance with the *National Constitution*.

Adopted: March 22, 2009