

NEWS RELEASE

Luther Strange

Alabama Attorney General



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 25, 2012

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AG STRANGE, DA VALESKA AND SHERIFF HUGHES ANNOUNCE SEARCH WARRANT SERVED AT CENTER STAGE ALABAMA IN HOUSTON COUNTY

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Luther Strange, Houston County District Attorney Doug Valeska and Houston County Sheriff Andy Hughes announced that a search warrant was served today at Center Stage Alabama in Houston County by law enforcement agents from the Attorney General’s Office, the Department of Public Safety and the Houston County Sheriff’s Office. This law enforcement action was taken in response to an ongoing investigation of illegal gambling operations. The search warrant was served this morning at Center Stage in Cottonwood, AL.

“Today’s actions are the culmination of an investigative process over the last several months,” said Attorney General Strange. “From my first day in office, I have worked to ensure that illegal gambling laws are enforced consistently across the state.”

As a result of the Attorney General’s efforts, the country’s largest gambling machine manufacturers removed their machines from Alabama last year, including the removal of all gambling machines at the shuttered Country Crossing casino. The casino, however, changed its name to Center Stage and reopened with new machines that state law enforcement agents determined were illegal.

“My office, along with Houston County District Attorney Doug Valeska, worked to try to resolve this matter with minimal controversy,” said Attorney General Strange. “We offered Center Stage an opportunity to resolve this matter by surrendering its machines to the State and to allow a court to determine the legality of the machines. After Center Stage simply refused to compromise or discuss this matter in good faith, we sent the casino a written order to cease and desist its illegal operations. Unfortunately, the casino continued to operate in open defiance of the rule of law and we have been left with no alternative but to treat this as we would any other law enforcement matter.”

The search warrant served today culminated in the seizure of several hundred machines and an undisclosed amount of cash from Center Stage. These machines, along with the seized money, will be held as evidence and will be subject to a forfeiture procedure in the Circuit Court of Houston County.

“Going forward, the Legislature can put an end to this type of illegal activity by simply increasing the penalty for the existing crime of operating an illegal slot machine from a misdemeanor to a felony. Until then, these individuals stand to make millions of dollars in illegal gambling profits while risking only a slap-on-the-wrist misdemeanor charge and law enforcement will continue to be forced to expend valuable resources to deal with the growing problem,” said Attorney General Strange.

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