

NEWS RELEASE

Luther Strange

Alabama Attorney General



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For More Information, contact:

Joy Patterson (334) 242-7491

Claire Haynes (334) 242-7351

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AG STRANGE ANNOUNCES DECISIVE COURT VICTORY IN GAMBLING CASE

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Luther Strange is pleased to announce that Houston County Presiding Circuit Judge Michael Conaway has issued a decisive ruling in a case involving so-called "electronic bingo." The final ruling today was the culmination of a joint law enforcement effort by the Alabama Department of Public Safety, Houston County Sheriff Andy Hughes, District Attorney Doug Valeska and Attorney General Luther Strange.

Law enforcement officers seized 691 illegal slot machines and gambling devices and \$288,668.62 in cash proceeds from the Center Stage casino in Houston County last year. The Judge's ruling today came after prosecutors from Attorney General Strange's Office presented evidence in a three day trial in Houston County. The machines will be destroyed and the money forfeited to the General Fund.

"The decision from Judge Conaway in Houston County Circuit Court marks a good day for the rule of law," said Attorney General Strange. "In a detailed analysis, the Court held that machines masquerading as electronic bingo are in fact illegal slot machines. Bingo operators have tried to create confusion in the law but this ruling ends the nonsense. Only the traditional paper version of the game commonly known as bingo is authorized by the Houston County bingo amendment, and slot machines cannot be used to play bingo."

The Court concluded the gambling devices seized at the Center Stage casino were "nothing more than illegal gambling cloaked in a 'Bingo' costume" and "not the game traditional game known as 'Bingo' as defined by the Supreme Court." In the ruling, the Court specifically found that the machines being used to play so-called "electronic bingo" were nothing more than illegal slot machines playing an illegal game that lasted only a matter of seconds. The Court found the game being played did not meet the six mandatory characteristics of bingo set forth by the Alabama Supreme Court in the 2010 Cornerstone case, which plainly requires that the human elements of the traditional game of bingo must be fully preserved in order for a game to potentially qualify as legal bingo.

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501 Washington Avenue • Montgomery, AL 36104 • (334) 242-7300
www.ago.state.al.us

Attorney General Strange also notes that "the fundamental legal principles which underlie today's ruling apply not only to Houston County, but in all counties subject to local bingo amendments. Since taking office, I have said that I will resolve the debate over electronic bingo in the courts. Today, another court has spoken and I hope this opinion will serve as a warning for those currently engaged in illegal gambling activities or contemplating operating slot machines in Houston County and throughout the state."

"Until the Alabama Legislature acts to create an effective deterrent for large scale illegal gambling, individuals will continue to engage in illegal gambling activity and openly defy the law. These individuals stand to make thousands of dollars in illegal gambling profits while risking only a slap-on-the-wrist misdemeanor charge. Law enforcement will continue to be forced to expend valuable resources to deal with this problem. The Legislature must change our law and create a badly needed deterrent for large scale illegal gambling by increasing the penalty for operating an illegal slot machine casino to a felony," said Attorney General Strange.