

January 6, 2025
For Immediate Release

Contact: [Steve Walker](#) (619) 843-7977
[Tanya Sierra](#) (619) 531-3315
En Español [Barbara Medina](#) (619) 531-3305

DA Files Charges Against SDSU Fraternity Members After One Student is Burned

Fraternity Pledge Suffered Third-Degree Burns During a Skit

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) said today that four members of a fraternity at San Diego State University have been criminally charged in connection with a skit performed at a party that led to one of the young men being burned over 16% of his body. The four defendants, who were active members and pledges of Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, were arraigned today in San Diego Superior Court downtown. All pleaded not guilty.

Caden Cooper, 22; Lucas Cowling, 20; Christopher Serrano, 20; and Lars Larsen, 19 were all charged with at least one felony. The charges include recklessly causing a fire with great bodily injury, conspiracy to commit an act injurious to the public, and violating the social host ordinance. If convicted of all the charges, the defendants face a sentencing range of probation up to seven years, two months in prison.

At the time of the incident, Cooper was the fraternity's president, Cowling was on the Pledge Board, and Serrano and Larsen were pledges. On the evening of February 17, 2024, in spite of being on probation by the university, the fraternity planned a large party at their fraternity house. Defendants Cowling, Serrano, and Larsen pre-planned a skit during which Serrano would set Larsen on fire. After consuming alcohol in Cowling's presence, the underage students executed the skit which caused burns to Larsen on 16% of his body, primarily on his legs. Larsen spent weeks in the hospital for treatment of third-degree burns.

After the fire, Larsen, Cooper, and Cowling made a concerted effort to thwart law enforcement's efforts to investigate the incident by lying to law enforcement personnel, deleting evidence on social media, and instructing other fraternity members to delete evidence and not speak to anyone about the incident.

All the defendants were released on their own recognizance but with specific conditions imposed by the court, including not to participate in any fraternity parties, not to participate in any recruitment events for the fraternity, and to obey all laws, including those related to alcohol consumption. The court set a readiness hearing for March 18, 2025 and a preliminary hearing date of April 16, 2025.

###

About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.

Follow the District Attorney's Office on

