

July 1, 2024
For Immediate Release

Contact: [Steve Walker](#) (619) 531-3890
[Tanya Sierra](#) (619) 531-3315
En Español [Barbara Medina](#) (619) 531-3305

Burglars on U.S. Visa Waivers Sentenced to Prison in Carlsbad Theft Case

Three Defendants Involved in the Break-in Were Wanted in Two States

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that three defendants who burglarized a home in Carlsbad in January, were sentenced prison terms between four and six years. The group is part of a foreign traveling crew using the Visa Waiver Program to get into the country to commit ‘burglary tourism,’ which has exploded in prevalence across the country.

Christian Tapia, 39 and Romai Aranepogge, 36 each received a six-year prison sentence and Joe Acevedo, 20, was sentenced to four years. All three pleaded guilty on June 4 to conspiracy to commit burglary, residential burglary, identity theft and resisting arrest.

“These criminals not only stole cash and valuables from the victims, but they also stole the community’s peace of mind,” DA Stephan said. “The message is clear: If organized criminal burglary rings come to San Diego County to commit crime, they will be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

On January 25, Carlsbad Police officers responded to a residence in a neighborhood that just months before was the subject to several residential burglaries. Once at the residence, police identified a suspect vehicle with stolen plates. When police secured the perimeter, the three defendants ran from the home into neighboring yards. When the defendants were caught and upon further investigation, police found that the defendants were wanted in Illinois and in Colorado for similar crimes.

The defendants are from Chile and Italy, and they largely follow the prototype of the South American Theft Group, believed to be responsible for 100 burglaries across San Diego County. Police investigations have found the suspect group to be made up of mostly Chilean men between 18-55. It has been determined that those involved in the theft group travel to the U.S. through the ESTA Visa Waiver program. This program allows people from Chile fill out an online questionnaire with no foreign background checks and receive a 90-day tourist visa. Most of the defendants involved in theft cases in the U.S. also have a criminal record in Chile.

Once in the country, the suspects obtain false foreign driver's license and IDs and use the fake identities to rent the vehicles. The burglary team members will all have what is considered a

work phone which most often is a pre-paid cellular phone. The suspects change the phone and or SIM card every 30 days or sooner.

The residential burglaries have similar circumstances. The homes were wealthy neighborhoods where houses backed up open space, a golf course, hiking trail or horse trail. On many homes, entry was made via a second story balcony.

“This case is part of a crime spree that has plagued our nation where organized criminal rings, often with criminal records in their own country, are given a visa to the United States that they use to commit burglary tourism,” DA Stephan said. “I’m proud of the Carlsbad Police department investigation and of our prosecution team for their continued work on taking down these roving theft networks that eat away at the safety and security of residential neighborhoods.”

Deputy District Attorney Malak Behrouznami prosecuted this case.

###

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.