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For Immediate Release

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## Criminal Charges Filed Against Pair of Men Caught Cheating at Poker at Two Area Casinos

### *Defendants Won More Than \$30,000 by Marking Cards*

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) said today that felony criminal charges have been filed against two men who won more than \$30,000 at two local casinos by working together to gain an unfair advantage at poker tables by marking cards. Vaagn Galustyan, 52, and Armin Martirosyan, 53, have been charged with two felony counts of conspiracy to commit a crime. The pair were arraigned in San Diego County Superior Court today and face up to three years, eight months in prison if convicted of all the charges.

“This method of cheating at cards goes back hundreds of years but with modern technology, the practice can be detected and those who would scam local casinos can be brought to justice,” said DA Stephan. “I’m proud of my office’s relationships with tribal governments and the cooperation we continue to have with them to successfully prosecute a variety of crimes that occur on tribal lands.”

The defendants, and a third unidentified person, went to Pala Casino and entered the facility separately but took seats at a table together playing Mississippi Stud Poker. Each man was caught on casino surveillance cameras surreptitiously bending the corners of the high-value cards they received—Tens, Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Aces. Each defendant is seen multiple times marking cards to help them see what cards the dealer might have in front of them to assist them in deciding how to bet on the subsequent rounds of the game.

After playing for a few hours, the poker table was shut down and the defendants left the casino without cashing in their chips. Both returned about five hours later in the early morning hours dressed differently. They completed a partial cash-in of their winnings, each going to two different cashiers. The total loss to Pala Casino was \$19,250.

The next week, the defendants went to Harrah’s Casino in Valley Center and repeated the same crime playing Mississippi Stud Poker. The defendants won \$13,410.

Because of its location and proximity to Native American reservations and casinos located in East County, the DA’s East County branch often handles cases involving crimes committed on the reservations or arising from casino activities. The DA’s cooperation and partnership with the tribes, their tribal councils, tribal law enforcement, and the Sheriff’s Department has

enabled the DA's Office to successfully investigate and prosecute these cases resulting in increased public safety on the reservations and in the casinos.

Casinos rely on randomness and fair play. Any physical alteration to the cards is a breach of those rules, and in most jurisdictions, it's also a criminal offense. Modern casinos actively look for card marking with surveillance cameras, table inspections, and frequent deck changes. Dealers are trained to spot bent corners, unusual handling, or other signs of tampering, and many casinos now use plastic-coated cards or card changes every 20 to 30 minutes to make this tactic harder.

A preliminary hearing was set for January 15. Deputy District Attorney Cal Logan from the DA's Special Operations Division is prosecuting this case. Deputy District Attorney Kristi Gill handled today's arraignment.

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**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.*

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