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related to the circumstances of Wednesday's incident."

Celeste has been a Denver County Court judge since 2000. She has received the American Association of University Women "Trailblazer Award," and last month she was given the 2011 Mary Lathrop Award by the Colorado Women's Bar Association.

## Denver Judge Mary Celeste accused of leaving young locked inside car

By **Jace Larson**  
9News

Posted: 07/30/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 07/30/2011 01:33:30 AM MDT

County Court Judge Mary Celeste is under investigation after police found a young child left alone locked in her car Wednesday at a Sam's Club parking lot.

The Denver Police Department is investigating the allegations that Celeste left the child alone while she shopped inside the Sam's Club near Alameda Avenue and South Broadway. Witnesses say she purchased olive oil and a movie.

A customer first alerted store employees early in the afternoon about seeing the child alone in a car. Employees called 911 and then tried to get the girl out of the car, but it was locked.

Firefighters responded to the scene and the judge returned to the car with her purchases before they could get the girl out of the car.

Charging decisions will be made by a special prosecutor to avoid a conflict of interest with the Denver district attorney's office.

"We have been cooperating with the authorities and will continue to do so," Celeste's attorney, Gary M. Jackson, said in an e-mail. "There are a number of extenuating circumstances that are

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# DA says no charges for judge who left child in car

Information from: KUSA-TV, <http://www.9news.com>

The Associated Press

Posted: 08/01/2011 11:13:37 AM MDT

Updated: 08/01/2011 08:20:54 PM MDT

DENVER—The Arapahoe County District Attorney's Office says criminal charges aren't warranted against a Denver County Court judge who left her grandchild in a car and went shopping.

Prosecutors say Denver police could still decide to pursue municipal charges. The Arapahoe County office had served as special prosecutor reviewing the case.

An attorney for Judge Mary Celeste said Monday she admits she left her granddaughter in a car while she went shopping, but she says there was water in the car, a fan was running and the doors were locked to the outside.

According to KUSA-TV ( <http://bit.ly/oC5A7H>), attorney Gary Jackson says

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BILL JOHNSON

# Johnson: Decision to leave child in car should haunt everyone

BOOKMARK PRINT EMAIL 12 COMMENTS

By Bill Johnson  
Denver Post Columnist

POSTED: 08/05/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

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Of course the Arapahoe County district attorney did not charge Mary Celeste. That sort of thing rarely, if ever, happens here or elsewhere when the suspect is a county judge.

Oh, but she should have.

Prosecutors and judges talk all the time about setting an example for the community when they charge or put someone away for a spell in jail. The community, they say, should have standards.

The one standard that should be inviolate in any community is that no one — man, woman or county judge — should ever leave a child alone in an automobile.

DA Carol Chambers said through a spokeswoman that her review of the Celeste case did not identify conduct that rose to the level of a state criminal-law violation.

Had criminal behavior been identified, she said, Celeste's position would not have mattered.

It was July 27 when Celeste pulled into a Sam's Club on West Alameda Avenue in Denver with her 6-year-old granddaughter.

Celeste needed olive oil and a movie.

Temperatures that day hovered around 90 degrees. Still, the judge left the girl in the car, leaving its fan running and water for the girl to drink. She locked the doors and went inside the store.

Later, a passer-by spotted the girl in the car and notified employees, who did what everyone in that position should do: They dialed 911.

"People every day put their own convenience over the safety of their children," said Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kansas-based Kids and Cars, a national nonprofit dedicated to preventing injuries and death to children in and around motor vehicles.

In an interview, she excoriated the judge, calling her act "very, very bad judgment."

She added: "Why did she not take that child with her? Would she leave a 6-year-old child at home alone? But she would in a car, where anything from abduction, a crash — anything — can happen?"

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An average of 38 children die in hot vehicles every year, she said. Last year, the number was 49, the highest one-year total since the federal government began keeping records.

So far this year, she said, 23 children have died.

Thirty percent of those who died got into the car on their own. Someone either left the keys in the ignition or left a door open, Fennell said. The kid goes in to play hide-and-seek. They die.

Twelve percent die after being knowingly left in the car, she said.

"People think, 'Oh, it'll only be five minutes.' But things change," she said. "Something happens. There is a long line in the store — anything. The sad fact is people are not educated enough to know a child can die that way."

Her website, [kidsandcars.org](http://kidsandcars.org), is a must for anyone who believes what Mary Celeste did was not that big of a deal.

Call it up and scroll over to "Types of Dangers." Hit the "Heatstroke" tab, and look at the pictures of the children. Click on one of them, and read the parents' stories. Try not to cry.

"The hardest thing is convincing parents that such deaths can happen to them," Fennell said. "It is happening to the best of parents."

Mary Celeste on Wednesday was issued a summons by the Denver city attorney for violating Municipal Code 34-43, wrongs against minors. A special prosecutor will have to be found.

Her attorney, Gary Jackson, said Celeste is "very sad and regretful" about what occurred and that she loves her granddaughter deeply and "has learned a lot."

She has enrolled in grandparenting classes, he said, adding that once her case is completed, she plans to do public speaking on responsibilities as a grandparent.

To her credit, she has never once dodged her culpability in what happened, never once said it was just a little thing, that the girl wasn't in danger.

That little girl, in my mind, was in as much danger as if she had been standing in traffic.

So, no, there will not be jail time.

Still, what Mary Celeste has been through, what she has endured so publicly, may be the best deterrent for parents of young children and for the community as a whole.

*Bill Johnson writes Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Reach him at 303-954-2763 or [wjohnson@denverpost.com](mailto:wjohnson@denverpost.com).*

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