

FOX19 Investigates: Children left alone in casino lots

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CINCINNATI, OH (FOX19) - A child left alone in a car for hours.

FOX19 Investigates has found reports of adults who left unattended children in local casino garages, then went inside to gamble.

We reviewed police reports and state records and uncovered disturbing accounts of Tri-State parents who left children alone in vehicles, sometimes for hours. The incidents happened at the Hollywood Casino in Lawrenceburg and the Horseshoe Casino in

Cincinnati.

FOX19 also obtained 911 calls made by citizens and casino security. In many cases, security officers called local police. In one call, a Horseshoe Casino security ambassador described the discovery of two unattended children in a vehicle.

[LISTEN: 911 calls from Cincinnati's Horseshoe Casino](#)

[LISTEN: 911 calls from Lawrenceburg's Hollywood Casino](#)

Horseshoe Security: "Unattended children. I have several children that are unattended in a vehicle."

Dispatcher: "How old would they be? You said there's three kids?"

Horseshoe Security: "There's two kids. One 11 and one 8-years-old."

Cincinnati Police records show since the Horseshoe Casino opened in Downtown Cincinnati in March 2013, police have received several reports of unattended kids left in cars in the garage. No one was arrested.

[Click here to view the police reports.](#)

Police calls from the Hollywood Casino detail the same problem. In one report, the officer wrote "*..three kids were left alone in a car.*" The children reportedly said they'd been inside "*...the vehicle for three hours and had to go to the bathroom...*" that "*Grandma had done this before and they were told to lie on the floor and hide.*" According to the report, casino surveillance video cameras caught the grandmother playing roulette almost the entire time.

In another report, a security officer found a 13-year-old girl who was left in the back of an SUV. The officer reported the child was hiding under a few coats to keep from being seen.

"At this point, that would not surprise me," said Bill Epps, Director of Outpatient Services at Central Community Health Board.

Epps said Ohio Child Protective Services referred one mother to them for gambling addiction treatment after she left her kids in the car at the Hollywood Casino in the middle of summer. He said while her actions may seem outrageous, gambling addicts are motivated by impulse.

"She had the air conditioning on and the car locked, but she left the kids there for 3 hours while she went gambling for several hours," he said. "She wasn't wantonly abandoning her children; she was attempting to care for them. But most of us would consider that unacceptable behavior for a parent."

In 2012 and 2013, Lawrenceburg Police responded six times to the Hollywood Casino on reports of unattended children in vehicles. In two cases, police arrested parents or guardians for neglect.

Across the country, there have been a number of parents arrested for leaving kids in cars, sometimes in extreme heat or cold. In January, police arrested a 24-year-old woman after they say she left her four-year-old daughter locked in a car alone for eight hours in a Maryland casino parking garage. She reportedly put blankets over the SUV windows to hide the child from passersby. The child was found cold and crying.

Given the millions who visit casinos every year, the number of these types of incidents may seem small.

"It's always unsafe to leave a child alone in a vehicle," said Janette Fennell, the founder and president of [KidsandCars.org](#), a national non-profit group that works to keep children safe in and around vehicles.

Fennell said these types of incidents are often not reported. Fennell's organization has documented 218 children left alone in vehicles at casinos nationwide. Kidsandcars.org said three of those children died.

"The information that we have been able to document is just the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately this is a practice that happens much more than anyone recognizes and it's very dangerous, Fennell said. "People need to realize when you're in a casino, you're on private property. We have tried to get information from the casinos, from their security departments to find out how frequently this is happening, but they're not very cooperative."

Representatives from both the Horseshoe Cincinnati and the Hollywood Casino Lawrenceburg declined on-camera interviews for this story.

A spokesperson for the Caesars Entertainment, the parent company of Horseshoe Cincinnati, sent FOX19 an email statement that read:

"Horseshoe Cincinnati takes numerous measures to ensure that all guests inside the casino are 21 or over. The casino security team also continuously patrols the property and works closely with the Cincinnati Police Department to ensure the safety of all patrons on our property."

A representative with Penn National Gaming, the company that owns and operates Hollywood Casino Lawrenceburg, told FOX19 the casino takes the issue seriously. As a member of the American Gaming Association, the casino follows a code of conduct that includes a clause to work to prevent underage unattended minors. The representative also added the casino has surveillance cameras and patrols that go through the lots.

FOX19 checked with Switzerland County Sheriff's for any calls of unattended children in vehicles at the Belterra Casino Resort. They found no reports on file.

There are no specific laws about leaving children in cars in Ohio or Indiana. However, police can charge parents with neglect or endangerment.

The Ohio Casino Control Commission monitors unattended children on casino properties but not in parking garages. That's up to casinos and police.

The commission did note a trend - they could ask for security cameras.

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