

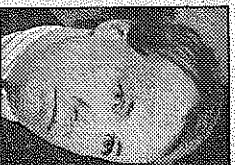
# Mother of boy missing in woods files lawsuit

## The Barry County prosecutor defamed her by calling her a suspect, she says.

By Ron Davis  
News-Leader

The mother of Josh Carlisle, the young boy with Down syndrome who was lost in the woods near Cassville last year, is suing Barry County and its prosecutor.

In a lawsuit filed Monday in U.S. District Court in Springfield, Johnny Coffey says Prosecutor David Cole defamed her by telling news media she was a suspect in her son's disappearance.



Cole

Josh Carlisle, 10, wandered from his home in March 1996 in bitterly cold weather, his mother said. For 2½ days, hundreds of people searched for the boy, losing hope with each passing hour. When a man on a horse found him, Josh became an instant media

celebrity, and his story was told around the world.

But Cole later told the media "the incident did not occur as initially reported. . . . We feel this boy did not walk away from home."

The county is being sued, according to the suit, because "Cole was authorized by the county of Barry to make statements to the press in his role" as prosecutor.

Cole wouldn't comment Monday because he hadn't seen the suit.

"I did not know anything about it," Cole said. "First I've heard of it." Barry County officials weren't familiar with the suit, either.

"If we've been sued, we haven't been served," Presiding Commissioner Cheryl Warren said.

Jay Kirksey, a Bolivar civil-rights attorney representing Coffey, would not elaborate on the suit. The five-count complaint, which seeks no specific damage award,



File photo

Josh Carlisle takes one of his daily walks with his mother, Johnny Coffey, to aid in his recovery from frostbite in 1996. The boy, then 10, was missing 2½ days during the bitter cold.

See **JOSH**, Page 8A

# Josh/Coffey consumer groups

## Story captivates Ozarks and beyond

The story of Josh Carlisle brought intense, if fleeting, worldwide attention to the Ozarks.

The 10-year-old with Down syndrome was reported missing March 6, 1996. Johnny Coffey said her son wandered from the family's rural Cassville home with two stray dogs. Thronges of rescuers searched the woods for two frigid days. Most people expected Josh to be found dead.

On March 9, Josh and the dogs were found less than two miles from Josh's house. The boy had frostbite on his extremities but was otherwise remarkably undamaged.

Josh and his mother made nation-

al TV appearances to discuss what was hailed as a miracle. A movie deal was struck with Josh's parents.

But Barry County Prosecutor David Cole was suspicious and called in the state Highway Patrol.

On March 25, Cole reportedly met with state investigators. Four days later, the News-Leader reported on the suspicions. At a news conference, Cole said he "believed there was criminal activity involved" in Josh's disappearance. But he never charged Coffey or her then-husband, Lynn, with any crime.

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representing domestic and foreign automakers, air-bag suppliers, dealers, insurers and two consumer groups.

They assume that millions of motorists will opt to have their air bags disconnected.

The government experts doubt that estimate. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has estimated the total at more than 1,000 people.

The groups have been lobbying the Clinton administration to avert a government plan proposed in January that would allow motorists the

—Ron Davis  
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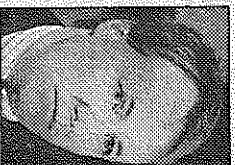
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