

Singer D4vd pleads not guilty to murder in death of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez



David Anthony Burke, whose stage name is D4vd, is arraigned Monday, April 20, 2026, in Los Angeles on charges of killing a 14-year-old girl whose dismembered body was found in his car. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TED SOQUI/AP.

(AP) — Singer D4vd pleaded not guilty Monday to a murder charge in the death of a 14-year-old girl who was last known to be alive nearly a year ago and whose dismembered and decomposed body was found in the entertainer’s apparently abandoned Tesla.

The charges revealed key details and were among the first concrete public moves made in a grisly and horrific case that had been under a largely secret investigation in the seven months since Celeste Rivas Hernandez was found dead.

The 21-year-old D4vd, whose legal name is David Burke, was charged with first-degree murder, lewd and lascivious acts with a person under 14 and mutilating a body, the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office said. A defense lawyer entered not guilty pleas to all counts on behalf of Burke, who made his first court appearance Monday. He appeared behind glass in a custody area, dressed in black. A judge said he would continue to be held without bail.

The girl’s parents appeared at the hearing. They looked down as they entered the courtroom and sat in the audience. They did not speak to reporters outside court.

Alleged child sex abuse during a career on the rise

Authorities alleged the Houston-born alt-pop singer killed Rivas Hernandez to protect a career on the rise after she threat-

ened to report their sexual relationship. His debut album, “Withered,” was released just two days after authorities said she was last known to be alive. She was reported missing by her family in 2024, when she was 13. That was her age when, according to allegations in a criminal complaint, the singer engaged in continuous sexual abuse of her for at least a year from September 2023 to September 2024. California law penalizes abuse of a child under 14 especially harshly.

Authorities, who described her Monday as a “runaway,” said Rivas Hernandez was 14 when she was killed with a sharp object on or around April 23, 2025, a day she was at Burke’s house in the Hollywood Hills.

Prosecutors allege Burke mutilated her body about two weeks later.

The murder charges include special circumstances — lying in wait, committing crime for financial gain and murdering the witness in an investigation — that could carry the death penalty. Prosecutors haven’t announced whether they will seek it.

The witness Burke is alleged to have killed is Rivas Hernandez herself, who could have given testimony about the sex crime allegations.

Defense says D4vd ‘did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernandez’

“We believe the actual evidence will show David Burke

did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernandez,” lead defense attorney Blair Berk said in court. “We would like to have the evidence come into the light of day.”

Berk told the judge that after media reports of months of secret grand jury proceedings, she would like a public preliminary hearing to take place as soon as possible so a judge can decide whether there is enough evidence for trial.

Burke is entitled under California law to have the evidentiary hearing within 10 court days of his arraignment. Nearly all defendants waive their right to have it happen that fast, but he didn’t. A hearing to work out what will happen next was scheduled for Thursday.

“We’ll be very happy to put on the evidence that we’ve collected,” said Deputy District Attorney Beth Silverman, the lead prosecutor.

A missing child and the grisly discovery of a body

The case is a “parent’s nightmare,” Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said at a news conference Monday announcing the charges.

The long-dead body of Rivas Hernandez was found inside a Tesla that was towed from the Hollywood Hills on Sept. 8, when Burke was on tour in support of his album. It was a day after she would have turned 15.

Her family had reported her missing from her hometown of Lake Elsinore, about 70 miles

(112 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles.

The singer had been under investigation by an LA County grand jury looking into the death. The probe was officially secret, but its existence — and Burke’s designation as its target — was revealed in February when his mother, father and brother objected in a Texas court to subpoenas demanding they testify. The 2023 Tesla Model Y was registered in the singer’s name at their address, according to court filings. Authorities did not publicly acknowledge him as a suspect until his arrest Thursday.

Police investigators searching the Tesla in a tow yard found a cadaver bag “covered with insects and a strong odor of decay,” court documents said. Detectives partially unzipped the bag and found a head and torso.

Investigators from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner’s Office removed the bag and “discovered the arms and legs had been severed from the body,” according to court documents. A second black bag was found under the first, and dismembered body parts were inside it. No cause of death has been publicly revealed, and police got a judge to block the release details of the autopsy. The court order was expected to be lifted after the charges.

“I had the chance to meet with some of the family members of Celeste and their grief is incal-

culable as to what happened to their daughter,” Hochman said.

D4vd was a social media-savvy singer making breakthroughs

D4vd, pronounced “David,” gained popularity among Gen Z for his blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop. He went viral on TikTok in 2022 with the hit “Romantic Homicide,” which peaked at No. 4 on Billboard’s Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. He then signed with Darkroom and Interscope Records and released his debut EP “Petals to Thorns” and a follow-up, “The Lost Petals,” in 2023.

The Associated Press confirmed that D4vd was dropped by Interscope last year.

When the body was discovered, the singer continued his North American tour, but when reports of his possible involvement spread widely, he canceled the final two shows and a European tour that was to follow.

On April 11, about two weeks before the killing, he made his debut appearance at the Coachella music festival, where he talked to the AP.

“I was such an internet kid. The internet is really what I claim as my home,” he said. “My neighborhood was Instagram and the society was the internet.”[7:55 PM]David Anthony Burke, whose stage name is D4vd, is arraigned Monday, April 20, 2026, in Los Angeles on charges of killing a 14-year-old girl whose dismembered body was found in his car.

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Monday, April 20, 2026

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