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Search continues for Waterville toddler

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WATERVILLE — Law enforcement and citizen search parties combed a Waterville neighborhood Sunday, but as evening fell, had not found missing 20-month-old Ayla Reynolds.

The toddler, dressed only in pajamas and wearing a soft cast from a broken arm, was last seen sleeping in her bed at 8 p.m. Friday, Waterville Police Chief Joseph Massey told reporters at a news conference Sunday afternoon. The FBI has been called in to assist state and local police and the Maine Warden Service in the search.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



LOOKING FOR ANSWERS: Maine State Police Detective Christopher Tupper, left, talks to Justin DiPietro after he arrived at his home on Violette Avenue in Waterville on Sunday as an extensive search was under way at his home and the neighborhood for Ayla Reynolds, his 20-month-old daughter. She has been missing since Friday. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



Search photos available for purchase: [Photo Store](#) →

Two search dogs, one from the Warden Service and one from Maine State Police, were at the house where she lives for much of the day Sunday.

Ayla was reported missing from her Violette Avenue home by her father, Justin DiPietro, at about 9 a.m. Saturday, when he found her bed empty. The girl's mother, Trista Reynolds, is living in Portland without a permanent address, Massey said. Both parents have been interviewed and are cooperating with the investigation, he said.

He said there were several adults at the home Friday night when Ayla went to bed. At least one of them was not a family member, he said.

Massey said “everything is on the table,” and is not ruling out an abduction.

“We covered quite a large area up there. Unfortunately we were not successful in finding little Ayla,” Massey told reporters. “That is our primary focus; to find a 20-month-old little girl who now has been missing at least 40, 45 hours and bring her home safely.”

Ayla was last seen wearing green, one-piece pajamas with polka dots and the words “Daddy’s Princess” on them. She is 2 feet 9 inches tall, and weighs approximately 30 pounds.

Her left arm is in a sling and soft splint. She has short, thin blond hair.

Massey said the search for the little girl began early Saturday and continued Sunday with firefighters from Winslow and Waterville assisting in a house-to-house search. Game wardens also searched the banks of nearby Messalonskee Stream.

“We’ve got detectives out there; we called in the Warden Service, state police and the FBI, who bring unique resources that the Waterville Police Department does not have,” Massey said. “Again, the goal is to find Ayla; to do that, I want to make sure that I utilize every possible resource that I can to find the child and get her back safely.”

Massey said the report of the missing child did not qualify as an Amber Alert, largely because of the timing of the missing child report.

“We did not utilize the Amber Alert system; this case did not fit that criteria,” he said. “Some of the criteria is that you have to have a suspect and you have to have a vehicle. In this particular case, we had none of that criteria. It was a missing child.

“You lose the advantages of an Amber Alert if you don’t get it out immediately. We didn’t get this information until 10 hours later.”

Massey said the Waterville Police Department did use an established automated telephone calling system, which calls everybody within a square mile and alerts them that there is a child missing, what the child looks like and where to report any information back to the police.

Massey would not discuss why the mother was in Portland without a fixed address or why the child was staying with her father in Waterville. He said he was uncertain if there are any child custody provisions in place.

Massey would not say if a door had been left open at the house or if there had been any uninvited entries into the house. He said Ayla broke her arm in an accidental fall three weeks ago.

Massey said investigators have interviewed everyone who was in the house that night.

Among the many private citizens who volunteered in the search for the little girl was Andrea Donadio of nearby Cool Street.

“I knew if I had children, I would want anybody in the community to help me find my child,” she said. “We went on foot to the river behind my house; out by Moody Street all the way down to Calvary Temple and by the big dam.”

Others, including Ashley Church of Norridgewock and Amanda Doody of Fairfield, said they were horrified to see the postings of the missing child on Facebook.

Church, 26, said she had two little girls of her own at home. Doody, 29, said she has two little boys. They said they could not just sit around without doing something to help.

“I would be devastated if nobody came out to help me look for my kids,” Doody said. “It’s almost Christmas; it’s just scary to think that we live in Maine and it’s happening here.”

Anyone with information regarding Ayla’s whereabouts is asked to call the Waterville Police Department at 680-4700.

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