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Ayla Reynolds' father speaks

WATERVILLE — The father of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds said Tuesday night he has no idea what happened to his daughter.

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In a statement released through the Waterville Police Department, Justin DiPietro said, "I will not make accusations or insinuations towards anyone until the police have been able to prove who is responsible for this."

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



STILL LOOKING: A searcher scours the emptied river bed of the Messalonskee Stream along West River Road near the intersection of Kennedy Memorial Drive in Waterville Tuesday afternoon for Ayla Reynolds. *Staff photo by Michael G. Seamans*



HUNTING HIGH AND LOW: Waterville and Winslow fire personnel and game wardens conducted another extensive search of yards and outbuildings at all residences on Violette Avenue in Waterville and surrounding streets for any signs of missing girl Ayla Reynolds on Tuesday. *Staff photo by David Leaming*

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The 20-month-old disappeared sometime Friday night or Saturday morning from the home she shared with her father at 29 Violette Ave.

“Ayla was in my sole custody at the time of her disappearance per agreement between her mother and I, because she was unable to care for Ayla,” he said in the statement, his first public comment since he reported Ayla missing. “I have shared every piece of information with the police.”

He also disputed reports that he and Ayla’s mother, Trista Reynolds, who lives in Portland, didn’t talk after Ayla went to live with him.

“Contrary to some statements floating around out there, I have been in communication with Ayla’s mother over the last couple of weeks. The Waterville police have transcripts from my phone for verification of those communications.”

“It has always been my intention to have a shared parenting arrangement with Ayla’s mother and I will continue to work towards that when Ayla is returned to us.”

He said that his family and friends “will continue to do everything we can to assist in this investigation and to get Ayla back home.”

Earlier Tuesday, a section of Messalonskee Stream near the home of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds was drained overnight as investigators on Tuesday continued to look for clues to her disappearance.

Investigators also examined Dumpsters, garages, backyards, ball fields and wooded areas near the Violette Avenue home where the 20-month-old girl was last seen sleeping in her bed Friday night.

Messalonskee Stream, a few blocks from the house, was drained so the Maine Warden Service could walk the banks, Waterville Police Chief Joseph Massey told reporters Tuesday afternoon. He said it was also to make visibility better for the warden service’s airplane flyover.

As the search entered its fourth day Tuesday, investigators remained closed-lipped on what they might have found. Overnight temperatures have dipped into the low teens and single numbers since the toddler disappeared overnight Friday or Saturday morning.

Massey said his department, the warden service and the FBI are intensifying efforts to find the child. The FBI is conducting a “knock and talk” campaign on nearby streets looking for answers.

“It’s still a missing child case,” Massey said. “I’m not going to speculate on whether she’s alive or when she might come home. We need to follow the logical conclusion of a logical sequence of events. We’ve ruled nothing out, so I don’t want to stand here and speculate.”

Massey said Ayla's parents, 24-year-old Justin DiPietro and her mother, Trista Reynolds, 23, have been interviewed and are cooperating. He would not discuss who else was in the house Friday night, whether foul play is suspected or if there was blood or any other forensic evidence found in the house or garage.

He would not say if police have any suspects in the girl's disappearance, nor would he discuss alibis given to police by those who have been interviewed.

Massey would not say why police seized two vehicles on Monday — one of them registered to DiPietro — or what authorities might be looking for in those vehicles.

Firefighters and game wardens conducted a grid search on foot Tuesday surrounding the 29 Violette Ave. home, from Cool Street to First Rangeway. A Kennebec County Emergency Management van was stationed at the nearby Fran Purnell baseball field on Mathews Avenue.

A Maine State Police evidence response team truck returned to the house Tuesday at about 1:30 p.m. State and local police were stationed outside the modest vinyl-sided home.

A state police special crime incident command and communications truck was in full operation in the Waterville City Hall parking lot.

Department of Public Safety spokesman Steve McCausland described the operations center, which has taken over the City Council chambers, as impressive.

“That’s where everything is being assigned; phones are ringing, assignments are being handed out — the wardens are there, the FBI, state police, Waterville police, all working together,” McCausland said before Tuesday afternoon’s press conference. “It’s a central focal point of where the investigation is today.”

Another Waterville police car idled near Champions Fitness Club in Elm Plaza, where game wardens Tuesday morning had searched a Dumpster.

Ayla was reported missing by her father just before 9 a.m. Saturday, about 10 to 12 hours after he said she was put to bed.

She 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 about 30 pounds.

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

Ayla's mother told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Monday that she had filed paperwork seeking sole custody of the toddler Thursday, the day before the toddler was last seen. Trista Reynolds filed a complaint against DiPietro for determination of paternity, parental rights and responsibilities and child

support, according to documents obtained Monday from Cumberland County Superior Court in Portland.

DiPietro could not be contacted for comment Tuesday and police were not allowing anyone near the Violette Avenue home.

Other family members, including Ayla's grandmother Becka Hanson, said Monday that Trista had gone into rehab for substance abuse and the state Department of Health and Human Services had turned the child over to DiPietro in October.

Hanson said Ayla was with her father when she broke her arm. Police have said the child's arm was broken in an accidental fall about three weeks ago, but have declined to provide further details.

Massey said 75 law enforcement officers have been engaged in the search each day since Saturday. He said police have received more than 100 tips from the public to help find the missing toddler in what he termed a "major investigation."

"We are very much committed to this investigation and will follow it to its conclusion," Massey said.

Massey said he was asked how he could stay optimistic when his department is involved in a missing child case.

"When I walk into the briefing room at 8 every morning and I look out at 75 officers, I see nothing but commitment, determination, energy and an attitude of, 'Let's get it done,'" Massey said. "That's optimism, that's inspiration and that's law enforcement at its best."

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