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By KATIE WIGGIN / CBS NEWS / December 27, 2011, 4:11 PM

Missing Maine toddler Ayla Reynolds was kidnapped, police say

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Ayla Reynolds / FACEBOOK

(CBS/AP) WATERVILLE, Maine - For the first time in the ongoing investigation of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds, police have said they believe she has been kidnapped. Investigators said Monday the 20-month-old was taken away and did not walk out on her own.

Pictures: Maine Toddler Ayla Reynolds Missing

Police Chief Joseph Massey said at a news conference, "At this point in the investigation, we are confident that Ayla did not walk out of the house by herself."

CBS Boston reports Massey would not hypothesize on whether her abductor was a family member, someone who lived in her father's house, or a stranger.

"We believe that someone removed Ayla from the house and that is where our investigation is focusing," says Massey. "I don't want to speculate beyond that, because we do not know who took Ayla out of that house and under what circumstances she was removed."

At a press conference on Monday, police announced the largest reward ever offered in the state to help find a missing person -- a \$30,000 reward for information leading to the return of the 20-month-old. Massey says the reward is the result of an initiative by private citizens who want to encourage anyone with knowledge of her whereabouts to come forward.

Law enforcement officials say the search for the toddler is ongoing, but lately, tips have dried up.

Ayla Reynolds was last seen on Dec. 17. Her father awoke to find her bed empty the next morning and reported her missing.

In the days since her disappearance, police have conducted an extensive search of the area around Ayla's father's home and followed up on the many tips they received. The recent Maine snow hindered search efforts over the weekend, but police continue to say they will not rest until she is found.



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A day prior to Ayla's disappearance, her mother Trista Reynolds had filed for sole custody of the toddler. Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro, was said to be unaware of that.

DiPietro has said he has "no idea what happened to Ayla or who is responsible." He said last week his family and friends would do "everything we can to assist in this investigation and get Ayla back home."

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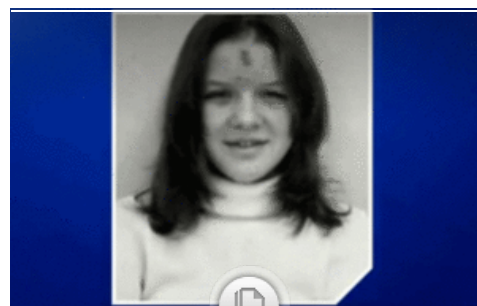


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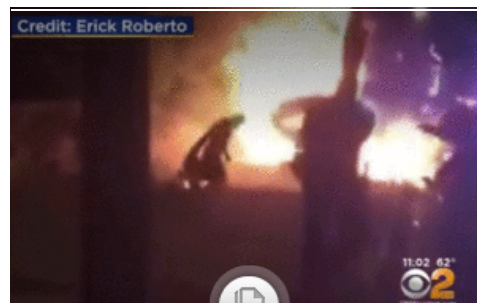


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