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# Ayla Reynolds' father issues second public statement

WATERVILLE -- The father of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds said Wednesday that he would never harm his daughter and implored whoever has the 20-month-old to bring her home safe.

BY [DOUG HARLOW](#) STAFF WRITER



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WATERVILLE — The father of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds said Wednesday that he would never harm his daughter and implored whoever has the 20-month-old to bring her home safe.

In his second public statement in as many weeks, Justin DiPietro, 24, said he wanted to set the record straight on his daughter's disappearance.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS





Justin DiPietro



TRIBUTE: Tara True, of Winslow, lights candles at the ever growing teddy bear shrine in front of missing 20-month-old Ayla Reynolds' Waterville home on Wednesday. Staff photo by Michael G. Seamans



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“I have to believe that Ayla is with somebody and I just want that person to find the courage to do the right thing and find a way to return her safely,” DiPietro said in a hand-written statement released Wednesday afternoon by the Waterville Police Department. “Even if that means dropping her off at a church or a hospital or some safe place.”

The 20-month-old was last seen sleeping Friday night, Dec. 16, at her father’s house at 29 Violette Ave. She was reported missing by DiPietro the next morning, some 10 to 12 hours later. She was wearing green polka-dot pajamas with a soft cast on her left arm.

A massive ground, air and water search was launched Dec. 17. Game wardens, state police, firefighters, civilian volunteers, the FBI and members of the Maine Association of Search and Rescue have participated.

Wednesday, DiPietro thanked everyone who has been involved in the search for his daughter, investigators and the community members who have offered a \$30,000 reward for her return.

DiPietro said he has not agreed to media interviews because he does not want to hinder the investigation.

“It is important that the public hear it from me personally that I have no idea what happened to Ayla and that I am not hiding,” he said.

Waterville Police Chief Joseph Massey has said DiPietro and Ayla’s mother, 23-year-old Trista Reynolds, of Portland, have been cooperating with the investigation.

DiPietro said questions raised in the national media about bruises on the child or how she broke her arm are “simply ludicrous.”

“I would never want anyone to spend even a minute in my shoes,” he said. “No one should ever have to experience this. It has affected me in more ways than anyone can imagine. Please don’t give up or lose hope, because that is easy to do. Please be grateful for what you have. I know what I don’t have.”

Meanwhile, police on Wednesday said the investigation into the toddler’s disappearance continued as it has for the last 12 days.

Massey said areas have been searched and searched again to make sure no piece of evidence is overlooked. He said Col. Joel Wilkinson of the Maine Warden Service will continue to make his personnel available as necessary to execute future searches.

“Our gratitude for their assistance is immense,” Massey said in a prepared statement.

As of Wednesday afternoon, 370 tips had come in concerning the whereabouts of Ayla, police said. Such leads have come in from as far away as California.

“Although we fully understand and appreciate the public’s desire to ‘know what we know’ about the case, we will continue to release only that information which is appropriate based on the direction of the investigation, and at a time when we are confident that such release will not compromise our progress,” Massey said.

On Monday, investigators said they are confident that Ayla did not walk out of the house by herself. Someone else had to have been involved in taking her, Massey said.

Trista Reynolds, the girl’s mother, had filed court paperwork in Portland for sole custody of the child on Thursday, Dec. 15. The state Department of Health and Human Services turned Ayla over to DiPietro in

October.

Trista Reynolds' family members have said she was previously in rehabilitation for substance abuse.

Waterville Deputy Police Chief Charles Rumsey said Wednesday that police know where Trista Reynolds was the night of Dec. 16, when there were several people at the Violette Avenue home.

However, Rumsey declined to share that information. Rumsey also wouldn't say whether there was another child in the same room with Ayla that night — as has been reported in the national media — or if there was forensic evidence, such as blood, found inside the house.

Authorities are not making court affidavits filed in the case public, including those for permission to search the house, garage and two vehicles seized by police from the Violette Avenue driveway.

“We're very cautious in this case; we don't put investigative details out there that could compromise a portion of this investigation,” Rumsey said. “That is our main concern. And when it comes to releasing those details to the press, we're going to err on the side of caution.

“We have talked to everyone that was in the house that night. We are confident that we know everyone who was in the house, as far as who stayed there and we talked to them all and we have talked to Trista Reynolds.”

Rumsey said he also is confident that Waterville detectives, game wardens, search-and-rescue volunteers and the FBI have done the best job possible.

“We've done everything right,” he said.

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