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Missing girl's mom said she was worried toddler wasn't safe with her father

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By Seth Koenig, BDN Staff

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Posted Dec. 29, 2011, at 11:50 a.m.

Last modified Jan. 27, 2012, at 1:58 p.m.

WATERVILLE, Maine — The mother of a 20-month-old girl [who went missing from a Waterville home two weeks ago](#) questioned whether her daughter was safe in the care of her father, less than a day after he released his own

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statement reiterating his innocence.

father pleads for child's return

The conflict between the two estranged parents of Ayla Reynolds has been the subject of increasing public scrutiny in recent days with news about progress in the search becoming harder to come by.

On NBC's "Today Show" on Thursday morning, Trista Reynolds, Ayla's mother, told host Matt Lauer she was worried the girl wasn't safe in the care of her father, Justin DiPietro.

"He would never let me see her," she told Lauer. "I would call to talk to her, and he'd get mad about it. If I did see her and I noticed something on her like a bruise or something, instead of acting in a calm manner, he would lash out about it or go into defense."

On Wednesday, DiPietro released his second public comments since he reported the girl missing the morning of Dec. 17. He told police he put Ayla to bed the previous night but found her crib empty before 9 a.m. when he went to check on her. That Ayla was wearing a soft cast on her right arm, due to what police have called an accidental fall, has been well publicized.

Ayla had been staying with DiPietro in Waterville since October, when Reynolds, who lives in the Portland area, checked herself into a 10-day rehabilitation program for substance abuse.

In a statement released through the Waterville Police Department on Wednesday, DiPietro said he "would never do anything to hurt my child."

"The questions of Ayla's arm or bruises or anything else being said are simply ludicrous," he said. "I would never want anyone to spend even a minute in my shoes. No one should ever have to experience this. It has affected me in more ways than anyone can imagine."

DiPietro added that he hasn't granted interviews on the case because he doesn't "want to in any way hinder the investigation" or fuel "additional media hype."

But Reynolds, who has granted several television interviews in the weeks since her daughter went missing, told Lauer on Thursday she's "in shock" over DiPietro's Wednesday statement. She said the two parents have not been in contact since the search began, despite her efforts to reach out to DiPietro.

When asked if she believes DiPietro is involved in Ayla's disappearance, Reynolds told Lauer, "Part of me feels 'yes' and part of me feels 'no.'"

"He says he's not in hiding, but why won't he come out, why won't he talk to me," Reynolds, who filed with the state to reclaim parental rights the day before the girl's disappearance, said on the NBC broadcast. "What is he so afraid of?"

She added: "He's the only one who can answer some of my questions. Just talk to me. That's all I want."

Neither of the parents are reportedly suspects in the disappearance — although investigators recently did announce that they've ruled out the possibility that Ayla wandered away from the home on her own, leaving the case an abduction.

Police acknowledged Wednesday that they have been very selective in releasing information about the case, saying they do not want to compromise their investigation.

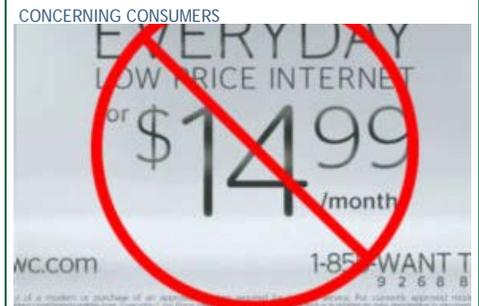
Since a privately funded \$30,000 reward for information leading to Ayla's safe return was offered Monday, police have said tips have poured in, with their overall total of leads nearing 400.



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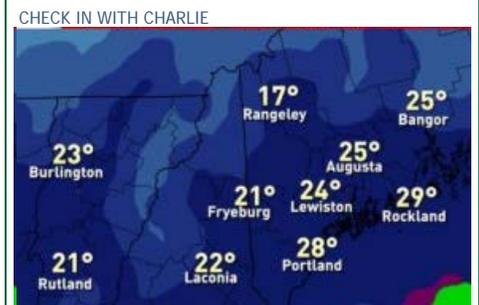
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