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# Ayla case puts police spokesman in spotlight

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BY **CRAIG CROSBY** STAFF WRITER



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Nancy Grace, the feisty host of a national TV news program, had pointed questions on the disappearance of 21-month-old Ayla Reynolds from her father's Waterville home seven weeks ago. The HLN personality's questions were carried electronically from her studio in Atlanta to a speaker tucked in McCausland's ear.

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



IN THE PUBLIC EYE: Maine State Police spokesman Steve McCausland stands in the snow outside the Department of Public Safety in Augusta as he is interviewed via satellite about the Ayla Reynolds case on a national news show on Tuesday afternoon. *Staff photo by Joe Phelan*



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There was cooperation, but only to a point.

“You’ve characterized it that way, Nancy — we haven’t,” McCausland said, responding to Grace’s questions about blood, some of which belonged to Ayla, that investigators found in the home’s basement.

Reynolds’ disappearance has captured the attention of media across the country, all prying for kernels of new information to give to a public hungry for details on what happened.

As the investigation enters its seventh week, McCausland wants to say just enough to keep the girl’s disappearance front and center in people’s minds without giving up details that police believe could hinder investigators’ efforts.

With the Maine State Police Major Crimes Unit leading the investigation, McCausland is the public face and voice of investigators, providing information they hope will spur that next big tip.

It’s a balancing act, but McCausland believes authorities have worked hard to protect the investigation

while keeping the public informed.

“We’ve asked for help consistently from day one,” McCausland said in an interview later Tuesday.

“We’ve done our best to keep the public informed because we are going to need their help to find Ayla.”

McCausland, again responding to questions filtered into his earpiece on Tuesday, offered Grace few additional details about the investigation and events that occurred the night of Dec. 16.

“We are going under the premise that little Ayla was there that night,” McCausland told Grace at one point.

There were three adults and three children in the house at 29 Violette Ave. in Waterville the night of Dec. 16 — DiPietro and Ayla, his sister Elisha DiPietro and her young daughter, and DiPietro’s girlfriend, Courtney Roberts, and her young son.

DiPietro has contended that someone took his daughter out of the home. But McCausland on Tuesday reiterated that such an abduction scenario is highly unlikely and doesn’t “pass the straight-face test.”

McCausland said over the weekend that the version of events presented by the three adults who were in the home “is not backed up by any forensic evidence that we have located” and that the adults “haven’t told us everything they know.”

Prodded by Grace, McCausland stopped short of making any accusations against DiPietro.

“We’ve talked to Justin on a number of occasions,” McCausland told Grace. “When we’ve called him, he’s talked to us, and we hope that dialogue continues.”

Pushing back

McCausland took the unusual step late Monday night of issuing a media statement reprimanding a TV news report for what he called an “unattributed, irresponsible and inaccurate” report.

WCVB TV in Boston reporter earlier Monday, citing anonymous sources, that police believed Reynolds is dead and had stepped up efforts to find her body.

By Tuesday, WCVB had revised the story on its website, saying instead that “hope is fading” among investigators, who it did not name.

McCausland acknowledged Tuesday that the statement was intended to be strongly worded.

“If you let it just stand, other stations are going to pick it up,” McCausland said. In fact, a local Channel 8 affiliate in Portland ran the WCVB report verbatim on its website, so “it was incumbent on us to make

sure the public understood what our position is.”

While there have been an unusual number of interviews granted and authorities acknowledge they had to react quickly to denounce the WCVB report, McCausland said the national media attention has had little impact how he and investigators go about their business.

“It’s a few new faces, but otherwise, there really is no difference,” he said.

McCausland said investigators released information about the blood found in DiPietro’s basement, and later acknowledged that some of that blood belonged to Ayla Reynolds, in response to a story first reported by WCVB on Saturday. Family members later posted similar information on a website, aylareynolds.com, saying police told them there was “more blood than a small cut would produce,” a detail that McCausland still won’t confirm.

The question of what details to release, and when, is a key challenge for McCausland and investigators.

“We obviously need a break in this case to locate this little girl,” McCausland said. “That’s going to come from information that’s given to us. It takes one call to break this case wide open.”

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