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# Ayla's uncle charged in fight

WATERVILLE -- The uncle of missing child Ayla Reynolds was summoned on an assault charge Monday

BY BEN MCCANNA



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The uncle, Lance A. DiPietro, 27, allegedly kicked Justin Linnell, 22, in the face after a brief scuffle in a parking lot off College Avenue.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



ASSAULT SEARCH: Waterville police officer Steve Brame searches the parking lot at Bill's Tire business in Waterville for evidence an assault took place involving Lance DiPietro and another man on Monday. *Staff photo by David Leaming*

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Linnell, who declined medical treatment, is the father of Ayla's cousin, Gabriella Linnell. Linnell and the girl's mother, Elisha DiPietro, are not married.

Lance DiPietro, of 19 Ash St., was driven to and from the scene by Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro, according to Waterville police Chief Joseph Massey, who described the incident as follows:

About noon Monday, the DiPietro brothers were driving north on College Avenue near Hazelwood Avenue. Across the street, they saw Linnell walking north. Justin DiPietro drove his SUV into a nearby parking lot and stopped. Next, Lance DiPietro climbed out of the passenger side carrying a wooden novelty baseball bat and confronted the man.

"DiPietro confronted him and said, 'You've been saying stuff about my family. Knock it off,'" Massey said.

DiPietro then dropped the bat and stepped toward Linnell, and there was a short struggle.

Linnell fell to the ground and suffered a large cut on the back of his head. While he was on the ground, DiPietro kicked him in the face, Massey said. Police photos of the facial injury are consistent with a kick, he added.

Next, DiPietro picked up the bat and got into his brother's SUV, and they drove away.

Later, the investigating officer, Steve Brame, found Lance DiPietro in Fairfield and questioned him, Massey said.

According to DiPietro's account for police, Linnell was shouting threats to the brothers as they drove past, and that's why they pulled over.

During a phone interview Monday, Linnell said the assault was unprovoked.

"I didn't even see them until Lance stepped outside the car with a baseball bat. By that time, I just said, 'OK, here we go.'"

Linnell's daughter, Gabriella Linnell, is in the custody of her mother, Elisha DiPietro, and lives at 29 Violette Ave., the home where Ayla was reported missing. Linnell said he had just left Waterville District Court in hopes of rescheduling a custody hearing for an earlier date. A protection-from-abuse order forbids Linnell to see his daughter, according to court records.

Lance DiPietro could not be reached for comment.

The assault charge, a Class D misdemeanor, carries a sentence of up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$2,000. He is scheduled to appear April 17 in Waterville District Court.

Justin DiPietro was not charged in the incident.

Lance DiPietro was convicted of seven misdemeanors and five civil violations since 2002, according to Waterville District Court records, including allowing a minor to possess alcohol, underage drinking and theft.

On Feb. 4, two windows were shattered at the DiPietro home in an apparent act of vandalism. Massey offered no updates on that investigation.

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