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# Ayla's uncle says he got into fight 'to protect my family'

Lance DiPietro, who attacked Justin Linnell with a baseball bat, says Linnell spread rumors about the family.

BY **BEN MCCANNA** STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



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WATERVILLE — The uncle of Ayla Reynolds says he didn't want an altercation Monday.

Lance DiPietro, 27, was summoned on a charge that he assaulted Justin Linnell, 22, around noon in a parking lot in Waterville. DiPietro was in a car driven by his younger brother, Justin DiPietro.

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Lance DiPietro said Linnell spread rumors about the DiPietro family after the disappearance of his brother's daughter, Ayla, in December.

"I don't get in fights," DiPietro said Tuesday. "But, in light of this situation, I have to be this person. ... I have to protect my family – and I will."

The incident began while Justin DiPietro was driving on College Avenue toward Fairfield. Lance DiPietro, who was in the passenger seat, said he heard someone shouting at them. He saw Linnell on the sidewalk across the street and said Linnell was acting in a threatening manner.

Linnell denied shouting at the DiPietros but confirmed that he had been openly speculating about Ayla Reynolds' disappearance in recent days.

Linnell is the father of Ayla's cousin, Gabriella Linnell. He is not married to Gabriella's mother, Elisha DiPietro, Justin and Lance DiPietro's sister.

A protection-from-abuse order forbids Linnell from seeing his daughter or her mother, according to court records.

"I just wanted to confront him and maybe have a war of words," Lance DiPietro said. "It's pretty unfortunate that things escalated the way they did."

A short fight ensued. DiPietro knocked Linnell to the ground and kicked him in the face, according to police. DiPietro then got back into his brother's car and they continued toward Fairfield.

Justin DiPietro said he was unaware of the fight.

"I didn't see anything that happened," he said. "We didn't discuss what had happened."

He said he didn't learn about the incident until police questioned him at home. He said he was upset with his older brother.

"Obviously, the situation that I'm in, it's not going to help anything by him going out and doing that," he said.

Lance DiPietro said he doesn't know what happened to Ayla and he tries to stay optimistic.

*Morning Sentinel Staff Writer Ben McCanna can be contacted at 861-9239 or at: [\[email protected\]](#)*

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