



# State



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VIDEO

## Ayla's mother going on offensive in search for missing girl

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PORTLAND, Maine — Trista Reynolds wants to know what happened to her little girl, Ayla Reynolds, but there's a limit to the details she wants to hear.

Reynolds said thinking of what might have happened to Ayla on Dec. 16, 2011 — the day [before the then 20-month-old toddler was reported missing](#) from her father's home in Waterville — brings on her darkest moments.

"I don't think I want to know what happened that night," said Reynolds during an emotional interview Wednesday with the Bangor Daily News. "I don't want to know if she had to suffer or if she was in pain. I don't want to know how she felt. That's not something a parent or a mother should have to feel."

As the search for Ayla Reynolds approaches two months in length, investigators [continue to sift through tips and leads](#) that now number more than 900, according to Stephen McCausland, spokesman for the Maine State Police.

McCausland said he expected the investigation to continue "quietly" this week, as opposed to [very public searches in the Waterville area](#) and press conferences that have punctuated the search for Ayla.

McCausland, who is the only law enforcement official making public statements about the case, has said that no one, including Trista Reynolds, has been ruled out as a suspect in Ayla's disappearance. However, McCausland has said that investigators believe the three adults who were with Ayla on Dec. 16 — Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro; his sister, Elisha DiPietro; and his girlfriend, Courtney Roberts — [know more about her disappearance than they have told police](#), including how [Ayla's blood wound up in the basement](#) of the DiPietro home at 29 Violette Avenue.

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Trista Reynolds said that although police haven't confirmed it, she is not a suspect. She said part of the reason for that is that police have told her things about the investigation. In recent days, Reynolds has posted some of those details on a website her family is maintaining at [www.aylareynolds.com](http://www.aylareynolds.com).

The Bangor Daily News will not repeat the accusations made by Reynolds because they could not be independently verified.

"The police have told me I can tell people whatever I want about the investigation, but that they won't back me up with it," Reynolds said.

McCausland said Wednesday he would not verify or deny Trista's statements or the information posted on the website. McCausland also said police continue to urge Ayla's family members to talk to the media. Asked if the Reynolds' public statements complicate the investigation — particularly details they say were given to them by police — McCausland said they have not.

Justin DiPietro has refused numerous requests for comment from the Bangor Daily News since Ayla's disappearance, including an unanswered phone call Wednesday.

"I have no reaction to specifics about what any family members are saying," said McCausland. "I also have no reaction or information about what the website has said."

Trista Reynolds said she has known some of the details she released over the weekend for several weeks, but chose to air them now in an attempt to put pressure on Justin, his sister and his girlfriend. Reynolds said DiPietro hasn't responded to her phone calls or text messages for about two weeks.

"If this is going to be how I'll get him to hear me, so be it," she said. "He won't answer my calls. He won't even text me. I'm not stupid. It's like, I know you know more than you're telling me. Whether you want to start being against me and clam up and hide away again, that's fine. I will put it out there for everyone to know the truth."

Reynolds said she also is going on the offensive in other ways. She said she is seeking a lawyer to represent her in a suit she wants to file against the Maine Department of Health and Human Services for placing Ayla into an unsafe environment. Reynolds said DHHS officials took Ayla from Reynolds' sister and mother and placed the girl with DiPietro. Reynolds was in a substance abuse treatment program at the time.

Reynolds said DHHS failed to protect Ayla by conducting background checks on DiPietro and the other adults who lived in the Violette Avenue home, inspecting the home for safety and following up with home visits.

Therese Cahill-Low, director of the DHHS Office of Child and Family Services, could not comment on the case of Ayla Reynolds or even confirm any involvement DHHS has had with her. But she did say the department's authority is limited whenever a biological parent wants custody of a child who is staying with extended family members, as was the case with Ayla in October.

"A parent has legal rights to their child unless they have an unsafe child protection background," said Cahill-Low. "Then it's the parent's responsibility to make sure the child is safe."

Asked what outcome she would hope for in a suit against DHHS, Reynolds said she is seeking a lawyer to help her answer that question, but so far hasn't found one, partially because she has no money to pay one.

"I want everyone to know that Ayla's mommy will not back down," she said.



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