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# Emotional grandmother speaks at vigil

WATERVILLE -- The paternal grandmother of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds stood Saturday on the City Hall stairs and tearfully addressed a crowd of about 100 people at an outdoor vigil.

BY **BEN MCCANNA**



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WATERVILLE — The paternal grandmother of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds stood Saturday on the City Hall stairs and tearfully addressed a crowd of about 100 people at an outdoor vigil.

“I’d like to thank the Waterville community and the ladies that put this on for Ayla today,” Phoebe DiPietro said. “I love her very much, and I want to thank everyone’s efforts for trying to bring her home. I pray that she will be home.”

It was the fourth vigil in Waterville for Ayla, who was reported missing by her father, Justin DiPietro, on Dec. 17.

DiPietro’s sister, Elisha DiPietro, stood in the crowd with her young daughter. She said she was pleased to see the community rally together.

“I’m glad that people are helping to keep Ayla’s name out there in the media, and they’re still supporting Ayla,” she said.

DiPietro said the past few months have been difficult for her family. They are dealing with a child’s absence, and public opinion is often against them.

“It’s hard to see how many people hate my family without actually knowing my family. We didn’t do anything wrong, and we just want Ayla home. We love Ayla, and we want her home,” she said.

Heidi Tudela, a friend of Justin DiPietro, attended the vigil with members of her family. She said DiPietro wanted to attend the vigil, but he was advised that his safety might be at risk at the public event.

“He’s received verbal threats and letters,” she said.

Tudela declined to say who advised him. DiPietro couldn’t be reached for comment.

The Teddy Bear Vigil was organized by Ayla’s Angels, a Facebook group of nearly 500 members, which was started by Waterville resident Laurie Bingham.

Participants brought about 100 teddy bears, which later were doanated to the Waterville Police Department in Ayla’s name.

Bingham said police could give teddy bears to children during times of family crisis or other emergencies.

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