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Ayla's family puts out call for help in search

Ayla Reynolds' maternal family is holding a vigil at 6 p.m. today at 22 Monument Square in Portland to commemorate her second birthday today. A Waterville group calling themselves "Ayla's Convoy" plans to travel to the vigil today from Elm Plaza at 3:30. Convoy organizers said anyone wishing to join them is welcome.

BY [BEN MCCANNA](#)



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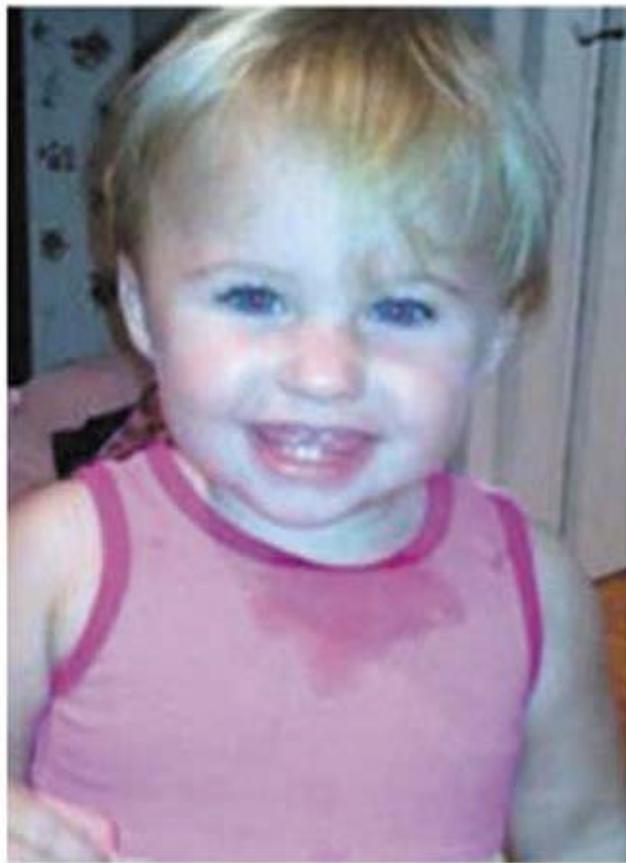
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The maternal family of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds has issued a call for action among able-bodied residents of Maine and beyond.

Today, on Ayla's second birthday, the family is asking people to search their property for any clues that might help investigators find the girl. The initiative is called a Gift for Ayla, and it first appeared last week on [answersforayla.com](#), a blog maintained by Ayla's step-grandfather Jeff Hanson.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS

MISSING



AYLA BELL REYNOLDS

of Waterville was 20 months old when she was reported missing Dec. 17, 2011.



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“We can cover more ground in a day than has ever been done in this state,” the blog states. “It would be like signing a birthday card the length and breadth of Maine with ten thousand names in letters an acre high.”

According to the site, the idea sprang from a recent press conference in Waterville when Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland urged residents of greater Kennebec County to search their property for clues.

Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service, who has led several multi-agency searches in the Waterville area, said Tuesday he encourages residents to perform their own searches in this case.

“People should search their land,” he said. “We’ll get a whole bunch of free searching, and somebody might come up with a clue. I think it’s a good thing.”

There are a few caveats, though.

“What we don’t want is people getting lost in the woods,” he said. “We also don’t want people to overdo it. We want them to stay in their comfort zone.”

Adam said he’s also concerned that local police might be overwhelmed with well-meaning searchers alerting authorities to insignificant findings. He said there’s a simple way to avoid that.

“If they find trash or garbage bags, or anything they can open and check out, I would say, ‘Open it and check it out.’ Then, if they find something they think is significant, they should leave it alone and call the local police to come and look at it,” he said.

He also encourages searchers to be systematic when covering ground — to move in straight lines — to make sure nothing is missed.

Ayla was reported missing Dec. 17 by her father, Justin DiPietro. For the next five days, hundreds of law enforcement officers and volunteers scoured Waterville for clues until snow ended the effort. On March 24, after a week of unseasonably warm weather, the search effort was renewed and expanded into Oakland and parts of Fairfield, Norridgewock and Sidney.

Adam said plans are shaping up for more searches in the near future, but wasn’t sure of dates.

McCausland said Tuesday he’s pleased with the effort he inadvertently inspired.

“It’s a wonderful gesture if homeowners decide to do that on Ayla’s birthday,” he said. “And, obviously, if there are any clues or signs, we want to hear from them.”

A \$30,000 dollar reward has been offered for any information that leads investigators to Ayla's whereabouts.

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

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