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Ayla's uncle heads to trial

WATERVILLE -- The uncle of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds pleaded not guilty Tuesday to an assault charge during an initial appearance at district court.

BY [BEN MCCANNA](#) 

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WATERVILLE — The uncle of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds pleaded not guilty Tuesday to an assault charge during an initial appearance at district court.

Lance DiPietro, dressed in a checkered dress shirt, stood before Judge Valerie Stanfill and listened to the charge against him: that he had assaulted Justin Linnell in a city parking lot.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



PLEA: Lance DiPietro, left, and his brother Justin DiPietro, leave 29 Violette Ave. in Waterville in December where Ayla Reynolds was reported missing. Lance DiPietro pleaded not guilty to a charge that he assaulted Justin Linnell in a city parking lot. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



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The charge carries a maximum sentence of one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine. There is a mandatory minimum fine of \$300.

Stanfill set a trial date for 8:30 a.m. June 27 at district court and asked DiPietro whether he would like a court-appointed lawyer, and he said yes. Stanfill also gave him the option of a trial by jury, which he can choose within 21 days.

After the arraignment, DiPietro said he wasn't sure whether he would take the option, but said he would discuss it with his appointed lawyer, Lisa Whittier. A trial is the best course of action, he said.

“Even if I do get convicted, hopefully I'll just get a fine or whatever,” he said. “I'm just hoping (the charge) gets dropped, honestly.”

The charge stemmed from a Feb. 6 incident when DiPietro allegedly kicked Linnell, 22, in the face after a brief scuffle in a parking lot off College Avenue, according to police.

Linnell, who initially declined medical treatment, is the father of DiPietro's other niece, Gabriella Linnell.

Linnell and the girl's mother, Elisha DiPietro, are not married.

Lance DiPietro was driven to and from the scene by Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro.

Also this week, Lance DiPietro is organizing a prayer vigil for his niece Ayla, who was reported missing Dec. 17. The vigil will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Church of God, 392 Main St.

"I just want to get a bunch of friends, family and the community together," DiPietro said. "I want there to be good energy, positive thinking and emotional support for Ayla. Hopefully we'll get her back where she belongs."

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

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