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# Missing toddler's dad and his family talk to police

As lines of communication are re-opened, there's also a hint that a substance with DNA found in the basement might not be blood.

BY **BEN MCCANNA MORNING SENTINEL**

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**WATERVILLE** – The family of Ayla Reynolds' father has reopened communication with investigators — a step that police are calling positive.

Meanwhile, the family's attorney said the DNA evidence that was found in the missing toddler's home might not be blood.

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Department of Public Safety spokesman Steve McCausland answers questions from media about the ongoing investigation in to the search for missing toddler, Ayla Reynolds, during a news conference at the Forum in downtown Waterville on Friday. *Staff photo by Michael G. Seaman*





Ayla Reynolds *Contributed photo*



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Police spoke in November with Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro; her aunt Elisha DiPietro; and her grandmother Phoebe DiPietro, said Steve McCausland, spokesman for the state Department of Public Safety, during a news conference Friday.

"I'm not going to disclose what was discussed, but it was a frank conversation," he said. "So there has been some renewed communication."

When asked whether the conversation changed the course of the investigation, McCausland said no.

"We wanted to give them an update, and we were very frank in the information we shared with them," he said. "I viewed the meeting with the DiPietros as positive."

In March, McCausland announced that communication between police and Justin DiPietro had “basically stopped.”

Steve Bourget, the Augusta attorney who represents Elisha DiPietro and Phoebe DiPietro, agreed with McCausland that the meeting was a positive step.

“It brought hope back to this family that the police were working for them and not against them,” Bourget said by phone Friday. “The family is still hoping for the safe return of Ayla alive.”

Bourget said that when police met with his clients, they presented the family with the physical evidence they had, including the revelation that DNA evidence that police found in the basement of the toddler’s home might not be blood.

“The DNA was a match to Ayla, but it wasn’t necessarily blood,” Bourget said.

When reached by phone Friday afternoon, McCausland said he had “no reaction” to Bourget’s statement.

In January, police announced that they had found an undisclosed amount of blood in the basement of the home.

Friday’s news conference was held to serve as a recap of the yearlong investigation into Ayla’s disappearance. Justin DiPietro reported the girl missing on Dec. 17, 2011.

McCausland initially said he would reveal no new developments in the case, but midway through a question-and-answer session with reporters, he announced the change in communication with the family.

McCausland added that police had communicated with Ayla’s mother, Trista Reynolds, on Thursday, and that investigators plan to meet with her “in the coming days.”

“We will share with her as much information as we can, as we’ve continued to do throughout the year,” he said.

The news conference also featured a new voice. Maine State Police Detective Jeffrey Love, who often has been in the background at similar briefings, made an appeal for more tips.

“A significant component of this investigation is the leads,” Love said. “We would like the public to forward any relevant information they feel would be beneficial to investigators. As time passes, please remember that it’s important to keep looking and listening.”

State police have followed up on 1,300 tips from 40 states, including Alaska and Hawaii, and Canada.

Love said all tips are followed, some by municipal police departments throughout Maine and the rest of

the country.

“Some leads are closed out within hours. Some take days, weeks or even months,” he said.

McCausland said tips from psychics are not wanted.

“Not one piece of information offered (from psychics) — although it’s well-meaning — has amounted to anything, and so the psychics need not call any longer,” he said.

Police are interested in hearing from people who might have first-, second- or third-hand accounts of the circumstances surrounding Ayla’s disappearance, “or specific items that might have been found.”

Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service said his agency, along with the volunteer Maine Association for Search and Rescue, did smaller searches for Ayla.

The smaller searches — combined with larger events that drew media coverage — have shown no signs of Ayla in a 5-by-7-mile area around her home.

“As we keep moving forward, we’ll keep expanding out and try to find where Ayla is,” Adam said.

As recently as last month, two searches were done in the New Hampshire communities of Mayfield Township and Stoddard, in the southwestern part of that state. Those searches were based on tips, McCausland said.

New Hampshire State Police conducted the search in Stoddard.

McCausland reiterated that the case is still active and ongoing regardless of the approaching anniversary.

“To investigators, December 17 is a date on the calendar and does not change a thing about the scope of this investigation,” he said. “We’re working for little Ayla. That’s who we’re working for. The investigators are as committed today as they were a year ago.”

Waterville Police Chief Joseph Massey spoke from a prepared statement, saying he’s often asked whether he is frustrated by the pace of the investigation.

“My answer is simple,” he said. “We cannot let ourselves become frustrated. We need to turn frustration into determination and commitment to moving this case forward, and that’s what we’re going to do.”

No one has been named as a suspect or a person of interest in the girl’s disappearance.

DiPietro contends that Ayla was abducted. Police say she was not and they believe the three adults who saw her last — her father, aunt Elisha DiPietro and Courtney Roberts — are withholding information in

the case.

Investigators also believe Ayla is dead. State police are asking that anyone with information call them at 624-7076.

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