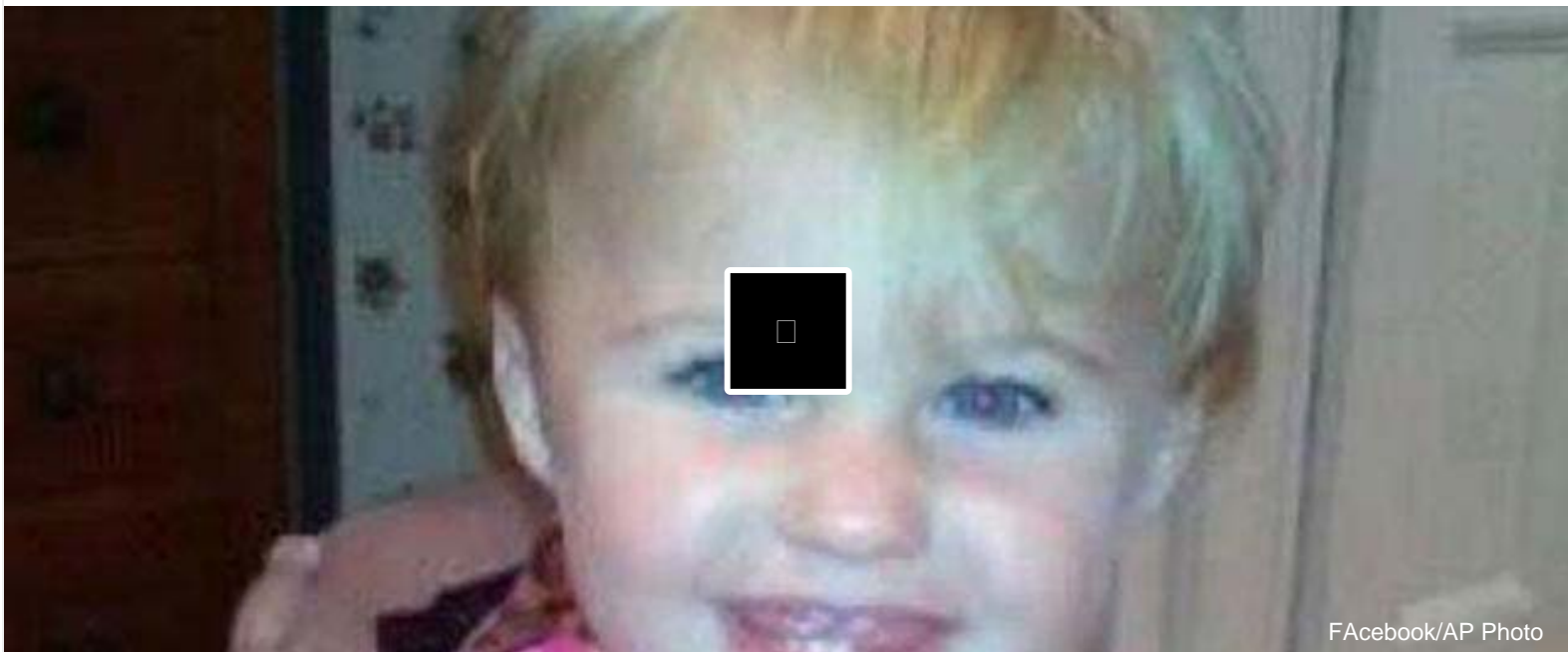


Missing Maine Toddler Ayla Reynolds: Police Suspect Foul Play

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By [CHRISTINA NG](#) and [COLLEEN CURRY](#) · Dec. 30, 2011



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Maine authorities investigating what happened to [toddler Ayla Reynolds](#) now believe foul play was involved in her disappearance.



"We base our conclusions on evidence gathered by investigators during the



past two weeks. This case has evolved from the search for a missing child to a criminal investigation," Waterville Police Department Chief Joseph Massey said in a statement tonight.

Ayla has been missing since Dec. 17.

"The men and women of the Waterville Police Department will continue to work cooperatively with the State Police and other agencies on this case until Ayla is located," Massey said in the statement. "Our commitment to finding Ayla and explaining the circumstances surrounding her disappearance is as strong as it was on December 17th."

Earlier this week, a [\\$30,000 reward](#) was being offered for information in the case.

"We are confident that Ayla did not let herself out of the house," Massey said Tuesday. "We believe that someone removed Ayla from the house, and that is where our investigation is focusing."

Investigators searched for the toddler through the holiday weekend. Police said they believe that additional leads that came in over the weekend were prompted by the coverage of the case on "America's Most Wanted."

The leads, however, have not yet led to any suspects and authorities are conscious of the time that has passed since Ayla was last seen.

"In most missing person cases, the longer the investigation goes on the more concerned we become that we can find the person safe, particularly when the case involves the most vulnerable members of our community such as children and seniors," Massey said earlier.

According to police, [Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro](#), 24, said he put the child to bed the night of Dec. 16 in his home and awoke the next morning to find her missing. Police have said several other adults were in the home, including one nonrelative.

Reynolds was living with her father while the girl's mother, Trista Reynolds, 23, was in rehab for substance abuse.

"I have no idea what happened to Ayla, or who is responsible," DiPietro said in a statement. "I will not make accusations or insinuations towards anyone until the police have been able to prove who's responsible for this."

Trista Reynolds' family said that the 20-month-old had been taken from their custody by the Department of Health and Human Services and placed with her

father. Reynolds said the baby, who broke her arm at her father's house two weeks before she disappeared, had begun showing mysterious bruising on her leg.

While DiPietro did not comment on the girl's alleged injuries, he disputed the Reynolds family's account of Ayla's custody.

"Ayla was in my sole custody at the time of her disappearance per agreement between her mother and I, because she was unable to care for Ayla," he said in the statement, his first public comment since he reported Ayla missing. "I have shared every piece of information with the police."

DiPietro also contradicted Trista Reynolds' claim that the two parents had not been in contact in recent weeks. Reynolds told ABC News earlier this week that she had filed for sole custody of Ayla on Thursday, but had not told DiPietro and had not spoken to him recently.

"Contrary to some statements floating around out there, I have been in communication with Ayla's mother over the last couple of weeks," DiPietro said. "The Waterville police have transcripts from my phone for verification of those communications."

Massey said that 75 agents from the Waterville police department, Maine state police, Maine game warden service, and the FBI are searching for Ayla. The warden service have searched a river close to DiPietro's house, lowering the water level and conducting ground and aerial searches through the river bank. Agents also sifted through nearby Dumpsters and garbage cans, but the searches turned up nothing, he said.

The FBI conducted a door-to-door canvass of the neighborhood around DiPietro's home to ask neighbors if they had seen anything suspicious. Massey said the police department was following up on more than 100 leads that have come in to the department from the public.

Investigators are asking that anyone with information about Ayla please call the Waterville Police Department at 207-680-4700.

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