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POLL QUESTION

Police search of Oakland area fails to find Ayla Reynolds

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OAKLAND, Maine — Like each attempt before it, an [exhaustive search of a wooded area](#) in Oakland on Wednesday for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds failed to locate the girl, according to Maine State Police spokesman Stephen McCausland.

“We did not find Ayla,” said McCausland during a news conference. “This is an area we’d looked at preliminarily in the past and investigators thought it was time to do a comprehensive search.”

McCausland said that investigators returned to the site after reviewing an early tip in the case, which police had received not long after [the girl’s December 2011 disappearance](#). It was the largest single search effort for the girl in more than a year.

“At this point we don’t have any more searches planned, but this is not the last one,” said McCausland. “All of our efforts from Day One to today have been to find little Ayla. ... This is the largest criminal investigation in state history and we won’t stop until we get that answer. ... We’re fairly confident that there aren’t any leads here that will lead to Ayla.”

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Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service said search dogs did turn up some animal bones, which he said “does prove that they are finding things we want to find.”

More than 30 personnel with Waterville police, Oakland police, Maine State Police and the Maine Warden Service, including four canine teams and police divers, participated in the search, according to McCausland.

Wednesday’s activities were the latest in at least 20 searches by investigators, most of which McCausland said have been in the Waterville area. The site of Wednesday’s search is less than 6 miles from the Waterville residence where Reynolds went missing while staying with her father, Justin DiPietro. The area had been searched at least three times before, including a preliminary survey by police dogs last week.

Search efforts focused on an area off Hussey Hill Road, McCausland said. Adam said the search area included a quarter-mile radius around the intersection of Hussey Hill Road and Nike Lane, an area of woods and a small pond. The property also includes the planned location for Ridgewoods Estates. It was cleared within the last few years to make way for the development.

Paul Stevens, who lives in the area, said game wardens arrived about 6:30 a.m.

“I’ve been hunting and snowshoeing out there before,” he said. “It’s all just trees, there’s not much out there until Zachary Drive. They must figure something is out there. I just hope they find her.”

Reynolds has been the subject of a police investigation for nearly two years, since she was reported missing by her father on Dec. 17, 2011. DiPietro told police that his daughter had gone missing overnight from his Violette Avenue home in Waterville. Within days, investigators said [they had ruled out that she had been abducted](#) by a stranger and in subsequent months sought to pressure DiPietro and two other adults, DiPietro’s sister and girlfriend, who were in the home on the dates in question.

Police first said that they had [found Ayla’s blood](#) in DiPietro’s home and have said they were convinced [DiPietro and the others hadn’t told them the truth about](#) what had happened to the missing toddler. On Wednesday, McCausland there had “been no change” in that assessment.

No one has been charged in connection with the toddler’s disappearance and investigators have said repeatedly that they have ruled no one out as a suspect. [At an emotional scene outside a courthouse in Portland last month](#), Trista Reynolds, who is Ayla’s mother, confronted DiPietro and his mother, Phoebe DiPietro, about the missing girl. Reynolds and Phoebe DiPietro accused each other of knowing what happened to Ayla; Justin DiPietro refused to speak.

Wednesday’s search took place about a month after Trista Reynolds [released new information about her daughter’s disappearance to several media outlets](#) in an effort she said was meant to increase pressure on investigators to file charges in the 2-year-old case. Reynolds claimed that the photos shown to her by state police depict her daughter’s blood on her car seat, her clothing, throughout DiPietro’s bedroom and on his sneakers.

State police wouldn’t confirm or deny what was shown by the photos they shared with Trista Reynolds.

“We know there’s frustration there,” McCausland said. “The family has a right to be frustrated. We haven’t found Ayla, but that does not deter us from the task we have committed to since Day One. Thousands of investigative hours have been devoted to this case, and it’s not over until we find her.”

In a statement issued Wednesday evening, Jeff Hanson, Trista Reynolds' stepfather, said her family is "encouraged" by the search.

"The magnitude of today's effort ... reassures us the investigation is active and being pursued with vigor," he said. "The Maine State Police announcement that scores of leads continue to come in, and their pledge to continue searching until Ayla is found, renews our hope that Ayla will be returned to us."

BDN writer Ryan McLaughlin contributed to this report.

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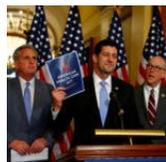


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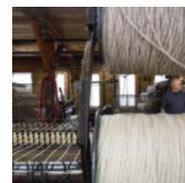
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