



Tuesday, March 21, 2017 Last update: 3:47 p.m.

Mother of Ayla Reynolds supports effort to fund cold-case investigation squad



Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Trista Reynolds, mother of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds, talks with the press outside the Cumberland County Courthouse in Portland on Sept. 25, 2013. *Buy Photo*






By Nick Sambides Jr., BDN Staff
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Posted Jan. 06, 2015, at 1:18 p.m.

PORTLAND, Maine — The mother of the little girl at the center of the state's most extensive missing-person investigation is lending her voice to an [effort to fund Maine's first full-time cold case homicide investigation squad](#), she said.

"I think it is great that there will be [detectives] working 24-7 on cold cases [if the squad is funded]. There are tons of grandparents and parents who have unanswered questions," 26-year-old Trista Reynolds said Monday night.

Reynolds, who fears her daughter's case will soon go cold, said she will join backers of funding the squad in testifying before the Legislature this spring in hopes that the effort will solve the mystery of the disappearance of Ayla

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Reynolds. Ayla was 20 months old when [she was reported missing](#) from the Waterville home of her father, Justin DiPietro, on Dec. 17, 2011. The case has since become the [largest missing person investigation in Maine history](#), but police have said they [do not think the girl will be found alive](#).

“Wherever they are, if I have to go and tell my story in front of the legislators, I would be 100 percent behind doing it. I have to be Ayla’s voice. Whatever I can do, I am down for it,” Reynolds said.

A law establishing the squad was passed last year but was left unfunded. Rep. Karl Ward, R-Dedham, [submitted a fiscal note to the law last month](#) seeking funding through the state’s general fund. The bill’s language is undergoing a legal review and will likely start being reviewed by legislative committees later this month, said Ward, who welcomed the Reynolds’ involvement.

The Reynolds family “is desperate to solve the case and they are not the only ones,” Ward said.

Ayla Reynolds is not among the 69 names on [the cold-case homicide listing at maine.gov](#). She is still classified as a missing person, said Stephen McCausland, spokesman for the Maine Department of Public Safety. He described the case as open and very active.

Maine State Police officials said more than two years ago they believe Ayla [was the victim of foul play](#). They said they don’t believe the child was abducted, and that they think DiPietro has not been completely forthcoming about what occurred the night of Ayla’s disappearance. DiPietro’s girlfriend and his sister were also at his home when the girl was reported missing. Police reported that blood found in the partially finished basement of the Waterville home was tested and could be traced to Ayla. No one has been charged in the case.

Reynolds said there is no implied criticism of state police in her joining the cold-case legislative effort.

“I know that they are working the case to their fullest. They have actually been really supportive,” Reynolds said. “We have had our differences but I definitely have come to grasp the fact that they are doing their job. They have a lot of other cases to work. They have been great on giving me answers and trying to keep my mind at ease as best they can.”

According to [a fiscal note](#), the squad would require a General Fund appropriation of \$332,020 and Highway Fund allocation of \$178,779 for two state police detective positions, one forensic chemist position and related costs. The costs would decrease slightly in following years, the note states.

Ward is hopeful the effort will be successful this year but said that with at least 1,500 bills being submitted seeking funding for all kinds of initiatives, his effort faces steep competition. One of the difficulties the effort faces, he said, is that education and social services programming consume more than 50 percent of the state budget.

“The good news is that the state surplus is increasing,” Ward said of the state’s recording a \$49 million surplus at the end of the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Patrick Day, a volunteer who built a website dedicated to the bill and to cold cases, [coldcasesquadme.com](#), said that the friends and families of cold-case victims, including Reynolds, plan to testify to the Legislature. Supporters also plan on holding a rally at the State Capitol, he said.

“We would like to have a huge turnout of people to come out to this,” Day said.

BDN writer Seth Koenig contributed to this report.



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