

January 25, 2019
Press Conference
Monroe County Sheriff's Office

Attended by: Sheriff Tommy Jones, Detective Jason Fillyaw, and Savannah's parents – Randall and Christina Pruitt

"I'm Detective Jason Fillyaw with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Investigative Division. On January 14, 2019, Savannah Leigh Pruitt, 14-year-old female from our county was reported missing by her parents, Christina and Randall Pruitt.

Our investigation has basically led us to this point. She was last observed by cell phone GPS to be in the Corbin, Kentucky area, possibly moving north to an unknown destination there.

We would like to ask the public's help in any way with tips that lead to the location and safe return of Savannah to her parents.

Again, Savannah is described as a white female, 14 years of age. She is 5'3" tall, 110 pounds, strawberry blond hair, blue eyes.

Last seen approximately 11 o'clock p.m. on the night of the 13th, but was found to be missing about 4:00 a.m. on the 14th.

Any questions?"

REPORTER: What was the date that you pinged her cell phone?

FILLYAW: It was pinged about 5:15 - 5:30 on the morning of the 14th.

REPORTER: So, the morning she was missing you were able to ping her cell?

FILLYAW: Yes

REPORTER: As soon as you noticed it was in Corbin did you send anyone or did anyone in Corbin, Kentucky begin looking for her?

FILLYAW: Yes. We reached out to the county sheriff's office in Corbin and they checked the area. The ping was close by within a relative location of the Welcome Center there in Corbin, or in Kentucky, just about a mile and half over the state line.

REPORTER: Is her phone still on?

FILLYAW: No. Her phone has been inactive since that last ping.

REPORTER: And she's been on or off social media?

FILLYAW: She has not been on social media, she has not been seen or heard from via social media or her cellular phone use since that last ping in Kentucky.

REPORTER: Is there any reason to believe or know why she would be in Kentucky or what she could be doing in Kentucky?

FILLYAW: None at all.

REPORTER: No?

FILLYAW: No.

REPORTER: Are you guys able to track her phone or anything even if it's turned off?

FILLYAW: No, that is not, that's something that there's, if the phone's not turned on - it's not sending or receiving signals - so it's not able to, we're not able to locate it at that point.

REPORTER: Are you able to look into or, I don't know the correct terminology, but go through the actions or messages that she sent prior to her missing?

FILLYAW: We've already reached out to all the cellular phone carriers and social media outlets and have produced in excess of 2,000 pages of reporting. Myself, the Federal Bureau of Investigation Knoxville office and the TBI have gone through each and every page of that reporting and there has been nothing in any of that reporting that led us to believe that she intended to run away or was speaking with anybody that would try to abduct her. So at this point, she's, this is, this is a missing person's case.

REPORTER: Endangered child or missing persons?

FILLYAW: She's not been upgraded to an endangered child at this point because we don't have any information as far as her being in any direct danger.

REPORTER: Does she have any special needs and medication or [inaudible]?

FILLYAW: No.

REPORTER: There's no immediate health?

FILLYAW: No.

REPORTER: And she's a minor, she's a missing minor?

FILLYAW: Yes.

REPORTER: What happens next?

FILLYAW: Well, after this gets released, after we get this out to the public, any and all tips that come in will be followed up by myself, the FBI, the TBI, and you know, we're gonna continue to be checking with her phone services to see if those phones do reactivate. They also have information in their systems to notify us if there's activation - immediately. So, at this point we're just waiting on her phones to activate and waiting on tips and information.

REPORTER: I mean, God forbid, her phone doesn't activate though and what if the right tips don't come through? A 14 year old girl is missing - for weeks. I mean, what can you do next, if?

FILLYAW: We just keep running, we just keep looking. We've got authorities in several different states already working on the case.

REPORTER: You do?

FILLYAW: Yes, we've reached out to authorities in four different states.

REPORTER: Are you allowed to disclose which states?

FILLYAW: We're not at this time.

REPORTER: But Kentucky and Tennessee are at least?

FILLYAW: Yes.

REPORTER: What types of things are they/could they be doing?

FILLYAW: They are following up on some leads of potential people that she may be with. We are looking into some background of maybe some friends, acquaintances that she may have had prior to you know, her moving to our area, and possible friends or acquaintances she may have developed after she moved to our area.

REPORTER: Is there anything that you guys, I know often times there's things that need to be withheld for the safety of the investigation. Is that the case here?

FILLYAW: Yes.

REPORTER: Can you just kind of explain that for the general public that while there are holes that we can't piece together
FILLYAW: Right, there's, there are some information that we are withholding at this time just to maintain the

integrity of the investigation, just in case that she is somewhere that, she, that may turn into that you know, could possibly turn into some kind of prosecution or something of that nature.

REPORTER: Is this common for this area of Madison County?

FILLYAW: This is not.

REPORTER: Can you kind of speak to what the kind of nature of this happening in a small town like this?

FILLYAW: I've been in an investigative position with this agency for three years and this is the first time we've gone, had a missing juvenile go to this level. Usually we locate them within 24 to 48 hours and they're home safe. So, this is the first time we've actually had to, we've actually gone on this long.

REPORTER: Is there anything about this investigation that sets it apart from any others? Are there more hands on deck, is there more technology that's being used, is the search area expanding?

FILLYAW: There is. The fact that we've reached out to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for assistance in this case. This is the first time that I know of that we've had to go to this level on a missing juvenile, to get the FBI involved. The TBI has assisted us on several cases before this but this is the first time we've had to reach to the federal level.

REPORTER: You know why, it's been about two weeks or more now, why bring this more into the public, like asking for the public's help?

FILLYAW: Cuz, at this point we have chased several leads that have just not, have not brought us the information that we were hoping to receive. So at this point you know, there's a lot more public obviously out there than there are of law enforcement and people see things and notice things that they may not think is important, that IS important. So you know, like I say, we're reaching out to the public in hopes that they may have seen her or seen her with somebody or in a vehicle and that information may be the key to finding Savannah safely and bringing her home.

REPORTER: Are there any specific areas that we should put out at certain times, you know, if a crime happens at a certain time at a certain place, at a certain rest stop near there?

FILLYAW: Like I say, she left in the very early morning hours of the 14th and it appears that she traveled on the interstate towards the Kentucky area and that's all the information we have at this point as far as, that we can, you know, that's tangible, holdable information at this point - that she did travel, looks like, up the interstate into the Kentucky area before her cell phones; she had two cell phones in her possession, before they both were turned off.

REPORTER: She had two phones?

FILLYAW: Yes. One was a phone from where she, from where they moved from and the other phone was a new phone that they had got when they got here.

JONES: As Detective Fillyaw said this is the first time that we've had any child gone for this length of time. That worries us. You know, we have involved the FBI and I'm grateful for their assistance, TBI's assistance and I'm thankful for you guys being here today to assist us in this investigation. At this point in time, we truly need the eyes and ears of the community to help look and watch and see and hopefully this will get circulated throughout the surrounding states. We can only imagine what the parents are going through and worrying about, thinking about. Most of us have children and we know how it affects us. So you know, we've, there are some things we can't talk about; but we maybe can in the future, but you know, the main purpose of this is to get the community and the citizens watching for us and helping. Much more of them than there are of us so, guys, I appreciate you.

[Inaudible]

REPORTER: Where did she go to school at?

MOTHER: She was homeschooled.

REPORTER: How long have you all lived here?

FATHER: We just moved back here the 27th of December.

REPORTER: Haven't been here long.

FATHER: Yes.

REPORTER: Do you think she's trying to go back to where you just came from?

FATHER: Nothing shows that, no. She wanted to move here for a farm setting - horses and things of that nature and that's what she had.

REPORTER: Nothing shows that she ran away?

FILLYAW: We're not sure of that at this point and that's also some of the information that we're not at liberty to release at this point. We just know that her mother, Christina, went into her bedroom about 4:30 in the morning of the 14th and she was gone. And, she checked the house and did not locate her. Mr. Pruitt went out and checked the farm and didn't find her anywhere on the farm and they notified law enforcement immediately.

REPORTER: Did she play any sport, have any teenage boyfriends or love interests?

MOTHER: No, no, no.

FATHER: No, just her horses, that was it.

MOTHER: Just her horses.

REPORTER: Was she in an equestrian group or a riding group?

MOTHER: No, she was just learning how to tack.

REPORTER: Do you have any suspects?

FILLYAW: No suspects at this time. We've chased a couple of leads that didn't pan out but we are working on some new leads and we're not at liberty to name anybody at this point just because if it doesn't pan out.

REPORTER: Abduction or runaway?

FILLYAW: Well like I said, I don't want to really say whether it was abduction or runaway at this point just in case some of these, any of these suspects do pan out.

REPORTER: So, it's a missing person (crosstalk)?

FILLYAW: At this point it's being treated as a missing juvenile, yes.

REPORTER: But those other options are not ruled out until you guys get finished?

FILLYAW: Exactly. Exactly, yes. You know, we're not willing to say either way until the investigation is complete and we find her.

REPORTER: Who can they call - CBI, FBI?

FILLYAW: You can notify us here at Monroe County Sheriff's Office at either 423-442-3911 which will get you here to the sheriff's office. After hours, it would be 423-442-HELP or 423-442-4357. That is our dispatch center and they will get in touch with me immediately. Also, 1-800-TBI-FIND which is the TBI's office for missing children. Any of those numbers will get you somebody 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and no tip will be ignored. At this point, all tips will be followed up on.

REPORTER: Are you guys checking the Easy Pass cameras and all that stuff?

FILLYAW: We are, we are. We actually have a, the FBI and TBI have been very helpful in reaching out to the different state agencies of the multiple states that we've been working in to look at traffic cameras, rest area cameras - things of that nature.

REPORTER TO REPORTER [INAUDIBLE]

REPORTER: Do you mind sayin where ya'll came from?

FATHER: We just moved up from Lawrenceville, Georgia.

REPORTER: But you're from here originally?

MOTHER: Yes, yes.

REPORTER: Were you guys going to switch places because the mic's at the podium?

FILLYAW: I'm going to let you all step in here.

REPORTER: You guys said that she's the oldest of four?

MOTHER: Yes.

FATHER: Yes.

REPORTER: Can you just talk about the rest of your family and how they're doing in light of everything [inaudible]?

MOTHER: We're very heartbroken. They miss her. They don't understand. Of course, none of us understand.

FATHER: It's like having your soul ripped out of your body. You can't think, you can't eat, you can't sleep, you can't rest. Life has just ceased for us since the day she left.

MOTHER: She was my sunshine. And, I put that on her Facebook; and now my sunshine's gone.

REPORTER: If she's watching at any point in time, is there anything you guys would want her to know or say to her?

MOTHER: That we love her dearly and we want her home.

FATHER: I love you and come home, for sure.

REPORTER: Outside of horse riding, is there anything else she was interested in?

MOTHER: Music, church.

FATHER: Anything fuzzy and cute and [inaudible - puffy? fluffy?].

MOTHER: Pigs.

REPORTER: She's a farm girl?

FATHER: Yes.

MOTHER: At heart, until we actually got here.

FATHER: Lizards, I mean she never met a strange animal that she didn't get. A raccoon she raised last year from a baby.

MOTHER: She was, she was all...

FATHER: All farm girl.

MOTHER: ...all farm.

REPORTER: Do you guys have extended family in this area?

FATHER: Yes, in Jefferson County, Hamblin County area.

REPORTER: So you guys are all together right now, leaning on each other?

FATHER: Yes.

MOTHER: Yeah.

REPORTER: I don't have any more questions [inaudible] anything you wanted to know before we wrapped up this portion of it.

FATHER: Think that is good.

MOTHER: Just please, help us find our baby. Please.

FATHER: Any tip would be appreciated.

[Background chatter]