



## Illegal Immigrant Charged in Murder of Iowa Teen Mollie Tibbetts

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A first-degree murder charge was filed Tuesday against a 24-year-old illegal immigrant in the case of missing Iowa jogger Mollie Tibbetts, state officials said Tuesday.

The suspect was identified as Christian Bahena Rivera, officials announced at a news conference.

According to the sheriff's office, Rivera is believed to have been in the area for four to seven years, the **Des Moines Register reported**, and was described as an illegal immigrant.

Rivera led investigators to Tibbetts' body, and told officials he had followed her and allegedly also ran alongside or behind her, the Register reported. Investigators were able to identify him after officials identified his vehicle in the same area Tibbetts was last seen running, according to surveillance footage.

Rivera had allegedly seen Tibbetts before. Investigators said they approached him on Monday and he was compliant and willing to speak with them. Investigators said he led them to Tibbetts' body, according to the sheriff's office, the Register reported.

Earlier Tuesday, **police announced investigators had recovered** a body believed to be that of the 20-year-old Tibbetts. The body was discovered in rural Poweshiek County, which includes Tibbetts' hometown of Brooklyn, Iowa, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation said in a press release.

At a news conference, investigators said they were able to hone in on Rivera from surveillance video provided "from the general public" — and that they also saw the young woman jogging.

"We are able to identify a vehicle that we believed belongs to Mr. Rivera," one investigator said. "It was a black Malibu. From that, we were able to track his pattern and the route in which he took.

"We were also able to find Mollie running on this video, and able to determine that he is one of the last ones to have seen Mollie running based on the video that we were able to see from the general public."

The investigator also said they were “able to pull him in during the investigation.”

“We conducted an interview with Mr. Rivera,” the investigator said. “During the interview, he says that he sees Mollie running and was able to come upon her, approached her.

“While he was interfacing with her, he actually felt as if he ran along beside her or around here. ... He tells him that Mollie grabbed a hold of her phone and said ‘you need to leave me alone.’ ... she took off running and he chased her down. At some point in time, he told us that he blacked out.”

For 34 days, federal, state and local authorities had scoured Poweshiek County for Tibbetts, and sifted through electronic data from her Fitbit, cellphone and social media accounts for any clue about what happened to the woman who was last seen alive while going for an evening run.

They'd also interviewed nearly 1,500 people.

The University of Iowa student's last known communication was a July 18 Snapchat message she sent to her boyfriend, Dalton Jack, for whom she was house sitting, according to the Register. Jack, who was out of town, looked at it but didn't immediately reply.

His "good morning" text the next day received no answer, and Tibbetts didn't pick up her phone when someone at the day-care center where she worked called to ask why she didn't show up. Every call went straight to voice mail.

The news that the highly publicized and gruesome crime was allegedly committed by a person in the country illegally drew immediate outrage. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, said: "As Iowans, we are heartbroken, and we are angry.”

“We are angry that a broken immigration system allowed a predator like this to live in our community, and we will do all we can to bring justice to Mollie's killer," she said in a statement.

The arrest is likely to spark calls for a further crackdown on illegal immigration, which President Donald Trump has made a core policy of his administration.

He often has claimed widespread crime by people living in the country illegally, citing among other things the indictments of 11 suspected MS-13 gang members from El Salvador charged in connection with the slayings of two Virginia teens. Trump also has held events at the White House with members of "angel families," whose relatives were killed by immigrants.

Although Trump claims legal U.S. residents are less likely to commit crime, several studies from social scientists and the libertarian think tank Cato Institute find that isn't accurate and states with a higher share of people living in the country illegally have lower violent crime rates.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said that it lodged a federal immigration detainer for Rivera after he was arrested on the murder charge. That move means the agency has probable cause to believe he is subject to deportation.