



Mollie Tibbetts Murder Suspect A Mexican In US Illegally: Police

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Authorities in Iowa said Tuesday they've arrested an undocumented immigrant in the murder of missing University of Iowa student Mollie Tibbetts, whose body was discovered Tuesday in a cornfield about 15 miles from her hometown of Brooklyn, where she was last seen in mid-July. Cristhian Bahena Rivera, 24, a Mexican national who has been living in the country illegally for about seven years, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder, which in Iowa carries a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Rivera's status as an undocumented immigrant drew an angry response from Iowa Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds, who said Tibbetts' murder should be viewed as a call for immigration reform.

"As Iowans, we are heartbroken, and we are angry," Reynolds said in a statement. "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."

Predictably, President Donald Trump raised Tibbetts' murder at a campaign rally in West Virginia Tuesday night and asked the audience if they had heard about the "illegal alien" charged in her death.

"You saw what happened to that incredible, beautiful young woman," Trump said at the rally. "Should have never happened."

At a news conference Tuesday, Division of Criminal Investigation Special Agent Rick Rahn said Rivera confessed to abducting and killing Tibbetts, then dumping her body in a cornfield near Guernsey, Iowa, about 15 minutes by car from Brooklyn. Rivera led investigators to the site Tuesday morning.

He did not speculate about a motive.

"I can't speak about the motive. I can just tell you that it seemed that he followed her, seemed to be drawn to her on that particular day, for whatever reason he chose to abduct her," Rahn told reporters at a news conference outside the sheriff's office in Montezuma, where Rivera was being jailed.

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.

Investigators said they believed Rivera had lived in the area from four to seven years. Rahn declined comment on his employment history, but described Rivera as someone who lived in a rural area and kept to himself. A search of Iowa court records revealed no prior criminal history, and it's unclear whether he had ever been subject to prior deportation proceedings.

Rivera's Facebook page described him as being from Guayabillo, a community of less than 500 people in the state of Guerrero. It's about a three-hour drive from the resort city of Acapulco.

Investigators said they zeroed in on Rivera after obtaining footage from surveillance cameras in Brooklyn. The footage showed a Chevy Malibu connected to Rivera that was driving back and forth as Tibbetts was running in the area, Rahn said.

An affidavit attached to the criminal complaint against Rivera alleged that he admitted to investigators he got out of his car and started running alongside Tibbetts.

Tibbetts grabbed her phone and said she was going to call the police. The affidavit says Rivera panicked and then said he blacked out. Rivera next remembers seeing her earphones on his lap, and taking her bloody body out of the trunk of his car, it said.

"The defendant further described during the interview that he dragged Tibbetts on foot from his vehicle to a secluded location in a cornfield," the affidavit said.

Investigators said they had earlier searched the area for Tibbetts but didn't find her, noting the body was covered by corn stalks when recovered early Tuesday.

Rahn said that Rivera was cooperating with investigators and speaking with the help of a translator. He said an autopsy would be performed on the body Wednesday by the state medical examiner's office, which would assist investigators in understanding whether Tibbetts had been assaulted or tried to fight him off.

On Tuesday night, deputies were guarding a trailer where the suspect had lived on a gravel road outside Brooklyn near a dairy farm.

Investigators have suspected foul play since Tibbetts was reported missing from Brooklyn, where she was dog-sitting for her longtime boyfriend. She was reported missing by her family on July 19 after she didn't show up for work at a day camp for children. Investigators say that disappearing on her own would have been inconsistent with her past behavior.

The search for Tibbetts — a psychology major who would have started her junior year this week at the University of Iowa — has captivated America's attention for the past month. Her

disappearance set off a massive search by dozens of agents from the FBI and state and local agencies, and reward funds swelled to \$400,000. Investigators have said they have followed "hundreds" of leads in the monthlong search.

Last week, Vice President Mike Pence met privately with the Tibbetts family during a visit to Iowa and told them that "you're on the hearts of every American."

At Brooklyn City Hall, city clerk Sheri Sharer said Tuesday was a sad day for the town.

"It never crossed our mind that she wouldn't come home safe," she said.

The University of Iowa mourned the loss of Tibbetts, a psychology major who would have started her junior year this week.

"We are deeply saddened that we've lost a member of the University of Iowa community," said university official Melissa Shivers, who urged students to seek counseling and other support services as needed.

Tibbetts, 20, was last seen about 7:30 p.m. on July 18 as she took a jog around her hometown of Brooklyn.

Over the past month, Tibbetts' family has pleaded for her safe return and her father, Rob Tibbetts, previously had said he had thought she was with someone she knew.

"I think someone went to the house that Mollie and that Mollie trusted and that she left with them willingly," Robert Tibbetts told CBS News earlier this month. "Now they're in over their head and they don't know what to do."

He told Fox that Brooklyn is a small town and "you can't do anything there without someone seeing it."

"The bottom line is somebody knows something," he previously told Fox News.