

New suspect wanted in slaying of 9-year-old Janessa Ramirez

By Marc Benjamin

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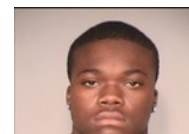


Fresno police Chief Jerry Dyer walks in front of the casket during the memorial service for Janessa Ramirez held at Cornerstone Church on Jan. 24. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE

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Fresno police said Wednesday night that they are looking for another suspect in the Jan. 19 crossfire shooting death of 9-year-old Janessa Ramirez.



The search for Donte Hawkins, 21, is focusing on Northern California, police said. They said they aren't sure where Hawkins is located.

"We have received information Hawkins is somewhere in Northern California," said Fresno police Sgt. David Ramsey in a prepared statement.



The lawyer for suspected gunman Isaac Stafford, 19, said he was told that Hawkins was one of "two or three" others in the Dodge Challenger that was driven by Stafford at the time of the Jan. 19 shooting. Stafford was released from Fresno County Jail Monday after the district attorney's office asked police for

further investigation in the case.

“I know the cops were looking for him,” said Eric Green, Stafford’s lawyer. “He has always been a person of interest in this case from day one.”

Green said Stafford was shot at, but didn’t have a gun and didn’t shoot at anyone.

Brian Cooks, 22, was arrested for Janessa’s murder. According to police Chief Jerry Dyer, Cooks admitted to firing his gun after being shot at while riding his skateboard near Clinton and Marks avenues.

Cooks said shots were fired from the car driven by Stafford. He said he fired once before his gun jammed. There were rounds found in a car that Cooks crouched behind.

Police said the shot that Cooks fired traveled 270 yards, striking Janessa in the stomach at a small strip mall where her mother and grandmother were talking to friends.

Stafford said he saw Cooks pull out a gun, Green said. “He was trying to shoot my guy (Stafford).”

Stafford told Green he didn’t know if Hawkins, or someone else, fired a gun from the car.

Also arrested in the case was Devonta Murphy. He was in possession of the gun used by Cooks when he was arrested last week, police said.

Cooks was arraigned Tuesday in Fresno County Superior Court. He remains in Fresno County Jail and his bail is set at \$2.2 million.

If anybody has information regarding the whereabouts of Hawkins, they are asked to call Fresno police homicide detective Adrian Alvarez at (559) 621-2445 or Crime Stoppers at (559) 498-STOP. Citizens who provide information can chose to remain anonymous.

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