

# FBI joining hunt for Waterbury man missing 2 years

## Police suspect foul play involved

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WATERBURY — It's been more than two years since Billy Smolinski vanished from city streets.

And now, the case that has long mystified local police is getting some help from the FBI.

Last month, the FBI assigned an agent to assist with the investigation into the disappearance of Smolinski, a Waterbury man who disappeared in August 2004. Smolinski, then 31, asked his neighbor to look after his German shepherd and said he was leaving for three days to look at a car. He hasn't been seen since.

Police said they have exhausted all local resources and hope federal assistance will bring them closer to uncovering the mystery.

"We feel we did all we can do from the local perspective," Police Superintendent Neil O'Leary said Saturday. "The case was investigated as thoroughly as it could be."

On Aug. 4, Deputy Chief of Police James F. Nardozzi sent a letter to Kimberly Mertz, the agent in charge of the FBI's New Haven Field Office, requesting FBI's assistance in conducting a joint investigation between local and federal authorities into Smolinski's disappearance.

"It is our belief there is a likelihood of foul play involved in the disappearance of Mr. Smolinski," Nardozzi wrote. "However in our quest to locate Mr. Smolinski we also believe we have exhausted all avenues of investigation available to us."

While police have never definitively stated that foul play was a factor in Smolinski's disappearance, Police Superintendent Neil O'Leary said Saturday that they have never ruled it out as a possibility.

"One of the three things happened," O'Leary said Saturday. "He may have disappeared on his own accord and, hopefully,

he is alive and well. There may have been foul play; someone may have harmed him and that's why he is missing. Or he may have disappeared and took his own life."

"I felt from the beginning that foul play was as likely a possibility as the other two."

Members of Smolinski's family have long expressed their frustrations with the police, who the family says ignored their concerns and were negligent and careless in their investigation. Over the past two years, the family repeatedly spoke to the FBI, put up countless posters of Billy and contacted Andy Thibault, a private investigator whose blog, [cooljustice.blogspot.com](http://cooljustice.blogspot.com), focuses on police and courts.

On the same day that Nardozzi sent his letter to the FBI, Thibault filed a Freedom of Information request against Waterbury police.

Last Tuesday, the Freedom of Information Commission held a hearing on the complaint and ruled that the police must deliver the file on the case within a week. The commission would then determine which of the records in the file can be released to the public.

During the hearing, police presented the letter to the FBI as evidence that they are still working on the case.

Janice Smolinski, Billy's mother, said that while she hopes federal assistance will help the police locate her son, the family remains angry about how case has been handled.

"Whether the FBI's participation will help remains to be seen," she said. "We've heard many promises that never came through."

Thibault said that while it's unclear whether the police were negligent in their investigation, the family's complaints should be carefully considered.

"I take their concerns very seriously," Thibault said Saturday. "I think they're certainly worth looking into."