

Republican-American

## **House backs standards on missing persons probes**

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BY PAUL HUGHES

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HARTFORD -- The state House of Representatives voted unanimously Tuesday to require the adoption of standards for investigating missing person cases.

The disappearance of a Waterbury man inspired the legislation, which is intended improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to locate and return missing persons.

The House passed a watered-down version of the original bill that requires the Police Officer Standards and Training Council to set protocols for investigating missing person cases.

The bill set five broad requirements to guide the POST Council in developing the policy. The original legislation proposed specific standards and procedures for law enforcement agencies to follow.

The law enforcement lobby, including the POST Council and the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, objected to the original bill. As a result, a compromise was struck.

"I think the bill reaches an appropriate compromise here," said Rep. Michael P. Lawlor, D-East Haven, co-chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

The revised legislation now heads to the Senate for final legislative approval.

The case of Billy Smolinski Jr. inspired the original bill. His mother, Janice Smolinski of Cheshire, was a driving force behind the effort to set standards for investigating missing person cases.

"It is almost three years since her son has been missing, and it is due to her efforts that this bill is before you today," said Rep. Vickie O. Nardello, D-Prospect. "I can't imagine the pain that she has gone through, and if I were to tell you the entire story, and believe me it is a long and twisted one, we would spend all afternoon here."

In August 2004, Billy Smolinski went missing from his Waterbury home, leaving behind his keys, wallet and dog. The Smolinski family has criticized how Waterbury police handled his case.

"Anybody that comes from the greater Waterbury area has heard about this case," said Rep. Anthony J. D'Amelio, R-71st District. "There are billboards that are up throughout the city of Waterbury with his picture on them. There are fliers in every store and restaurant that you could imagine in the city of Waterbury."

Nardello said she expects the POST Council's protocols to reflect standards and procedures proposed in the original bill.

"I ask that particular attention be paid to improving communication with the family. No one should have to go through what the Smolinski family went through," she said.

The original bill required law enforcement agencies to provide family members or individuals making missing persons reports with general information on the handling of the case.

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The bill also initially prohibited police from refusing to accept missing persons reports because the individual is an adult or the circumstances don't indicate foul play. The original bill mandated the state police to enter information regarding missing persons into appropriate federal databases.

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