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Missing people's families await new Connecticut law

By GREG SMITH
Norwich Bulletin

NORWICH -- Families of missing loved ones are counting on a new state law to provide peace of mind when it comes to the law enforcement's handling of the cases.

Janice Smolinski of Cheshire spearheaded passage of the bill in the wake of the Aug. 24, 2004, disappearance of her son, William "Billy" Smolinski, 31, and what she said was a pattern of inaction by Waterbury police in the subsequent investigation.

ADVERTISEMENT She considers Gov. M. Jodi Rell's signing of what Smolinski calls the "watered down version of the bill" last month a small victory. The initial bill, as submitted, would have mandated a uniform set of procedures, covering everything from the dissemination of information to the submission of DNA samples from coroners and medical examiners.

"There is not a uniform national procedure for investigating these cases," Smolinski said. "I'm pushing to get Washington to make it a national issue. If we can just get people to grab hands here. It's not just a local issue."

The final version of Connecticut's bill rests with the Connecticut's Police Officer Standards and Training Council, which will

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Erika Cirioni Missing since: Dec. 31, 2006. Missing age: 26. Hair: Red. Eyes: Blue. Height: 5 feet, 7 inches. Weight: 158 pounds. Missing from: Norwich. Distinguishing characteristics: She has a tattoo of a Chinese symbol on her back and the name "Lewis" on her right ankle. Medical conditions: Her mother believes Cirioni suffers from bipolar disorder. She has known substance abuse issues, including alcohol and cocaine. Clothing: Cirioni was last seen wearing blue jeans, sneakers, a

develop and implement a policy by Jan. 1. The board is in charge of training and requirements for municipal officers across the state.

Executive Director Thomas Flaherty said the board is researching the document and will look at policies other states have in place as well as guidelines used by such organizations as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

"We plan to draw from all available resources in deciding what's appropriate," Flaherty said.

While state police follow a prescribed set of policies, there are no uniform guidelines for local police departments. Juvenile cases typically are handled with immediacy, but cases of missing adults sometimes are lost in the shuffle or not taken as seriously.

As of Jan. 1, there were 110,484 active missing persons cases in the FBI's National Crime Information Center.

Carol Cirioni of Norwich also believes the fact her missing daughter is an adult hasn't helped that case progress. Erika Cirioni, 27, a mother of two, has been missing since Dec. 31.

"I don't care how old they are, they're still our children," Cirioni said in tears Tuesday. "I just hope they're checking."

Norwich Police Lt. Stephany Bakoulis said missing persons reports are handled on a case-by-case basis, depending on the circumstances. Because of Cirioni's history of substance abuse, the case has risen to the level of endangered missing. Because of a different, and complex set of circumstances, Billy Smolinski also is identified as endangered.

Divers search river

Several times city police detectives have acted on tips, searching areas for signs of Cirioni. Last month, divers searched the Thames River after a tuft of hair was discovered by a fisherman. Bakoulis said the DNA was tested and was not a match with Cirioni.

green shirt and a black jacket that had a fur hood.

ON THE WEB

- For more information on William Smolinski: www.justice4billy.com
- For information on missing persons: www.Find-the-Missing.org
- Unidentified Decedent Reporting System: www.identifyus.org
- National Center for Missing Adults: www.theyaremissd.org
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: www.missingkids.com
- North American Missing Persons Network: www.nampn.org
- Project Jason Campaign for the Missing: www.projectjason.org
- Cold case profiles: www.charleyproject.org
- International Internet Response for Missing People: www.someoneismissing.com
- National Crime Information Center: www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/ncic.htm

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Smolinski and Cirioni say they have little hope of seeing their children alive again.

Kelly Jolkowski, president and founder of Project Jason, said the organization's Campaign for the Missing is focused on passing model legislation in each state to allow agencies across the country to use the best procedures and technology to help find the missing. Her son, Jason, 19, disappeared from her driveway June 13, 2001.

Janice Smolinski is a volunteer with the organization.

Jolkowski awaits to see the final outcome of Connecticut's law and wants to know if there are provisions requiring coroner and medical examiners to take DNA samples before disposing of bodies.

She said procedures for investigating missing person cases are minimal at best in many departments across the country. Without training and education for these departments, many of the missing will remain so, she said.

"We need to use DNA as a tool to resolve cases using the CODIS (the FBI's Combined DNA Index System)," she said. "Many time, bodies are found but never reported to other agencies. A lot of these unidentified bodies could be our loved ones and we don't know it. Thousands of these bodies have been disposed of and we'll never know the answer."

"It's not just Connecticut, it's across the board," Jolkowski said. "This is 2007. We have the technology, why aren't we using it?"

Reach Greg Smith at 425-4219 or gasmith@norwichbulletin.com

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William Smolinski Missing since: Aug. 24, 2004. Missing age: 31. Hair: Light brown. Eyes: Blue. Height: 6 feet. Weight: 200 pounds. Missing from: Waterbury. Distinguishing characteristics: A tattoo of a blue cross with the name "Pruitt" in the cross on left forearm; a tattoo of a blue cross with an orange outline on right shoulder. His left ear is pierced with a small diamond.

WHERE TO CALL

- Anyone with information about the disappearance of Erika Cirioni of Norwich is urged to call Norwich Police at 886-5561, or the anonymous tip line at 886-5561, Ext. 500.
- Anyone with information about the disappearance of William Smolinski of Waterbury is asked to call the New Haven office of the FBI at (203) 777-6311.

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