

WATERBURY: Police release file on missing man

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BY BRYNN MANDEL

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The state Freedom of Information commission on Wednesday ordered the release of much of the police investigative file in the case of Billy Smolinski Jr., a Waterbury man who disappeared nearly three years ago.

The file included statements from those who had seen Smolinski in the days leading to Aug. 24, 2004, when the then-31-year-old Naugatuck native was last seen. The documents detail leads and tips chased down by Waterbury police, from September 2004 through June of last year. Waterbury police said last August that they had "exhausted all avenues of investigation available to us" and were turning the case over to the FBI.

A FBI spokeswoman said Wednesday the agency is investigating the case, and they continue to receive information from Waterbury police.

She declined to answer any other questions.

Across all 14 of the written reports made public Wednesday, the offense listed was "missing person."

Smolinski's family has long said they believe something bad must have happened to him, that he would not just leave.

Information contained in the documents released Wednesday did nothing to change that belief, said Janice Smolinski, the missing man's mother, as she huddled over the pages alongside her husband, journalists and private investigators.

Later, she reflected, "It was just an emotional day. We really need to sort through it."

A few documents were withheld from the public. It was unclear what they contained.

Witnesses' statements to police weave a tale of a love triangle that entangled Smolinski before his disappearance, a break-up he was upset about, as well as one tip police received that Smolinski may have been murdered.

So far, no arrests have been made and investigators previously have said they were not certain a crime occurred.

A Waterbury police spokesman reserved commenting Wednesday night, other than to say that the city department passed its information to the FBI, and some of that information was being investigated actively by the federal agency.

Andy Thibault, a Litchfield private investigator who writes the Web log about public safety issues called the Cool Justice Report, filed a Freedom of Information complaint seeking the police documents about eight months ago.

Thibault said he hopes to assess the contents in coming days to determine, among other things, the vigor with which police pursued this case.

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"At this point, we have more questions than answers," Thibault said.