

**chance**

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**To:** <Undisclosed-Recipient:;>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 21, 2007 8:04 PM  
**Subject:** Fw: Residents Fight For Legislation

**Residents Fight For Legislation**

by Josh Morgan  
Herald Staff

Talk to any mom and you'll quickly discover there is no stronger force in nature than a mother's love for her children. It is a force that can turn even the most quiet and reserved woman into an outspoken advocate for change in Connecticut. Just ask Cheshire resident Janice Smolinski. The strange story of her son's disappearance began nearly three years ago, and the flaws the Smolinski family has encountered during the investigation has turned Janice into a different woman. With her newfound strength, Janice Smolinski spearheaded legislation — with the help of State Rep. Vickie Nardello, D-Prospect — that will change the way missing person cases are handled in Connecticut. The legislation was unanimously approved by both the state House of Representatives and state Senate this session. Last week, Gov. M. Jodi Rell signed the bill. The Smolinskis now hope change in Connecticut, and hopefully across the United States, will be on the way.



*Josh Morgan/Cheshire  
Janice and William Smolinski stand  
their Cheshire home last week. She  
holding a photo of their son, Willie  
Smolinski Jr., who has been missin  
past three years.*

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Just ask Cheshire resident Janice Smolinski.

The strange story of her son's disappearance began nearly three years ago, and the flaws the Smolinski family has encountered during the investigation has turned Janice into a different woman.

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by both the state House of Representatives and state Senate this session. Last week, Gov. M. Jodi Rell signed the bill. The Smolinskis now hope change in Connecticut, and hopefully across the United States, will be on the way.

“Not only does Connecticut have a problem,” Janice said, “the entire country has a problem.” She believes the law enforcement system is broken when it comes to handling missing persons cases.

Getting changes implemented, however, has been a long and emotional journey that also exposed flaws in the system. Flaws the Smolinski family hope will change. From lost DNA samples to slow responses from the police, Janice’s hopes are that the system will be revamped; a system that she says has treated her family unfairly. Her story begins on August 24, 2004, the day Janice’s 31-year-old son, William Smolinski Jr., went missing. Billy, as he often was called, asked a neighbor to watch his dog Harley while he was out of town for a few days. When the neighbor went to Billy’s house, the dog was locked inside, but no key had been left out as planned. Immediately the family knew something was wrong. After waiting three days to file a missing persons report, the Waterbury police stepped in. They found Billy’s keys and wallet under the seat of his truck, which was parked in his driveway. Other than that, William Smolinski Sr. said the police weren’t much help. “We had to do everything ourselves,” he said. “We organized our own search parties to look for our son.” The family offered up DNA samples to the police. But after several weeks, there was still no word. Janice went back to the police department and asked if the DNA had been entered into federal databases like CODIS. CODIS, or Combined DNA Index System, is a universal database that local, state and federal law enforcement agencies can access to help link crimes or to identify remains across the country. They were told it had not been entered, and in fact, were told the department had not even heard of CODIS.

“My wife had to explain how to use the DNA to the police,” William Sr. said. “Imagine that.”

The new act calls for the state’s Police Officer Standards and Training Council to review the way they handle missing person cases and adopt and implement a policy no later than January 1, 2008. Not a lot of attention was paid to Billy’s case since he was a healthy 31-year-old male, but the Smolinskis are hoping that all missing person cases will be handled the same way, regardless of age or sex.

They also hope that law enforcement agencies across the country will have specially trained officers who will be able to help with crisis situations like a missing child. “Every state needs someone on staff that can help,” Janice said.

Her thoughts were echoed by her husband who said there should be “one or two” trained officers who can “take control of the situation” when needed.

Frustrated at the lack of knowledge the Waterbury Police Department had on DNA, Janice Smolinski wants additional training for officers so they are more knowledgeable on the subject.

“The most important part of this is to educate them on DNA,” she said. “We are in 2007. It’s time to educate.”

U.S. Rep. Christopher Murphy, D-5th District and U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman have both contacted her within the last couple of weeks, and she hopes that, with their help, the legislation can be taken to a federal level.

In addition to the new legislation, Janice wants to put faces of missing persons on playing cards that can be distributed among prisons.

The idea is similar to the “most wanted” playing cards that U.S. soldiers were given in Iraq. In Polk County, Fla., unsolved homicide cards were distributed to 2,500 inmates and fresh leads and tips came in almost immediately for some of the cold cases.

Her husband said cards like these are a great idea and he thinks they would work for missing persons as well. “Criminals like to talk and brag,” he said. “They also might be interested in reward money that they can collect when they get out of jail. Any little tip could help.”

Despite their efforts, there has been no word or sign of Billy Smolinski since August 2004. The Smolinskis are all but certain that he was murdered.

Although their story is ongoing, Janice hopes changes to the system will help other families whose worries might just be starting. “These changes aren’t going to help

Billy,” Janice said. “But maybe they will help another family.”  
For more information about Billy Smolinski Jr. and his story, visit  
[www.justice4billy.com](http://www.justice4billy.com).