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Disappearance spurs family action

Man missing for 17

months, still no leads

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WATERBURY — The family of a Waterbury man who has been missing for nearly 17 months wants the governor to compel local authorities to take a "very active role" investigating his disappearance, or involve the FBI.

More than 750 electronic signatures have been added to an online petition since it was launched two weeks ago by the Oregon-based nonprofit ChildSeek Network and the family of Billy Smolinski Jr. The petition, at www.petitiononline.com/bs2004/peti-tion.html, cites concern by Smolinski's family that "police refuse to take his disappearance as serious." They hope to deliver 1,500 signatures to Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

Police say they've handled the case seriously but cite the lack of new information or leads as hampering progress. Smolinski, then 31, disappeared from his Holly Street home in Waterbury on Aug. 24, 2004, leaving behind his keys, wallet, white pickup truck and German shepherd, Harley.

"We're very frustrated. There's nothing going on," said Billy's mother, Janice Smolinski of Cheshire. "This is not working with the police department and Billy's important to us. We can't just let this go."

Waterbury Police Sgt. Christopher Corbett listed searches of phone records, interviews with numerous people, a search using dogs and forensic processing of Billy's home and vehicle as evidence of the extensiveness of the police response.

"At this point in the investigation, we have done everything we possibly could," said Corbett, adding the matter is still under investigation and considered a missing-person case since investigators found no evidence to indicate foul play.

Despite repeated assertions by Waterbury police as such, the family believes that something bad must have happened to Billy. Based on their close-knit relationship, they say Billy, a tow-truck driver and HVAC worker, would never vanish on his own.

The last person known to have seen him was a neighbor, who Billy asked to look after his dog while he went up north for three days,

perhaps to see about a car. According to family and police accounts, Billy told the neighbor he would leave a key behind. He never did. In the months to follow, neither his bank account nor Social Security number registered any activity.

Compelled by the Smolinskis' story, state Rep. Selim Noujaim, R-74th District, is proposing a bill this legislative session that would designate Aug. 24 — the anniversary of Billy's disappearance — as Missing Persons Day. For it, Noujaim conferred with the Smolinskis, who he met at a vigil last summer marking the first anniversary of Billy's disappearance.