

Bill seeks quicker searches for missing adults

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WATERBURY — Changes in how authorities handle missing-person cases involving adults may be on the way.

That's partly because of advocates from the family of a city man who disappeared nearly three years ago.

State Reps. Vickie Nardello, D-Prospect, and Stephen Dargan, D-West Haven, have introduced legislation that would set protocols for when someone is reported missing to police.

The process that unfolds now when an adult is reported missing to authorities varies.

Depending on the department — and even an individual officer — waiting periods to file a missing-person report can range from hours to days, experts say. Most police depart-

ments base their response on whether there are signs of things like despondency or foul play which elicit a swifter response than, say, someone prone to taking off without notice.

But federal law requires police to immediately enter reports into state and national databases of juveniles who disappear.

"We seem to have more guidelines for underage adolescents, but for adults there's not the same guidelines," said Dargan, calling the first hours in investigations critical.

"We hope that we're able to set some standards as we go forward that will be helpful to law enforcement and victims (families)."

Connecticut's proposal comes



Smolinski

at the behest of Cheshire's Janice Smolinski and her family, who met with Nardello to discuss shoring up the law.

In August 2004, Billy Smolinski Jr., Janice's then-31-year-old son, vanished from his Holly Street home, leaving behind his keys, wal-

let, truck and dog.

Saying they had exhausted their resources, this past August Waterbury police asked the FBI to get involved in the investigation.

City police deferred comment on the proposed changes in law until its specifics were more clearly defined.

"We've found, in the last 2½ years, that the system is broke," said Janice Smolinski, who has heard the same cry from other

families of missing adults.

Of the more than 7,300 people reported missing and recorded in the National Crime Information Center by police in Connecticut in 2004, 36 percent were adults.

Testifying before the Public Safety and Security Committee in Hartford last week, Smolinski outlined tools and training she felt was important.

This included:

- Establishing standard guidelines for swift police responses to reports of missing persons.

- Educating authorities about local and national DNA databases and, in cases deemed serious, requiring police to enter DNA samples into them.

- Increasing information-sharing between police and medical examiners.

One goal would be to help

identify "John Doe" corpses and, in turn, close some missing person cases. Some of these measures are included in a New Jersey proposal the Connecticut one is based upon.

"It may save a life," said Smolinski.

On Thursday, the legislative committee voted to draft a formally worded bill. Dargan said the exact language and contents are evolving, and that both law enforcement authorities and advocates for the missing would be consulted.

Next, the committee would vote to send the bill on in the process toward becoming law. A similar proposal has been introduced by state Sen. Tom Gaffey, D-13th District.

Connecticut's proposal is one of several similarly being considered by states nationwide.