

House Bill 6113
AN ACT CONCERNING THE INVESTIGATION OF MISSING PERSON REPORTS
Testimony of Janice Smolinski

Representative Dargan, Senator Hartley and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee

Good Afternoon.

My name is Janice Smolinski and I'm here to testify in full support of Bill #6113, an act concerning the investigations into missing persons.

Our family's private Hell began six and half years ago when my 31-year-old son, Billy, vanished from his life.

A sluggish response from the Waterbury Police Department – typical in the case of adult missing persons – started a domino affect that reverberates to this day. Impossibly strong leads were not followed, evidence was destroyed, seven DNA samples were lost, and basic information from Billy's case was not entered into national data banks for three years.

At the time of his disappearance Billy was involved in an explosive love triangle. This case involves a gravedigger, a long distance trucking company, a school bus driver, a politician, and a violent group of drug addicts.

My son walked into a hornet's nest.

Law enforcement officers in the FBI, the Seymour Police Department, the Shelton Police Department and the Connecticut State Police have all told us Billy was murdered in August 2004, and buried somewhere in the lower Naugatuck Valley.

Efforts to recover his body continue to this day.

Despite overwhelming evidence of foul play, the Waterbury Police Department told a reporter that Billy was probably having a beer in Europe and would come home when he was ready. That comment was cruel and insensitive, and was uttered 18 months after Billy was murdered.

Unable to get the Waterbury police to seriously investigate Billy's disappearance, we hired private investigators, brought in private search dogs and began to piece the puzzle together ourselves. Our search for Billy brought us into the hornet's nest in Woodbridge, where I was arrested for hanging a missing person poster of my son, and sued by Billy's ex-girlfriend, Madeline Gleason.

But our search revealed more than political and police corruption, we stumbled blindly into the world of the missing and unidentified dead. We learned that

160,000 other Americans are missing, and that coroners and medical examiners hold the remains of 40,000 unidentified dead. This is a national disaster.

The president of the International Homicide Association, Bill Hagmaier, has publicly stated that a majority of the missing have been murdered, and are now the unidentified dead. The way to cross-reference these two groups is with DNA sampling. We live in a time when the most popular show in America is CSI, yet most of our local and state lack police lack

basic working knowledge of DNA. They don't know how to properly collect DNA or enter it into the proper databases, like NamUs.

This can only change through training.

There are hundreds of unsolved homicides in Connecticut and 700 missing persons, yet the police in Connecticut continue to oppose this legislation.

Why?

Four years ago West Hartford Police Chief James Strillacci, the head of the Police Chief's Association, testified that legislation was unnecessary because there was no problem. Yet weeks later a missing 15-year-old girl was discovered hidden beneath the stairs of a home in a West Hartford, Chief Strillacci's town.

Two years ago Chief Strillacci again opposed efforts to reform the way law enforcement officers respond to the report of a missing adult. Shockingly, Chief Strillacci told Channel 3 news that he "wasn't going to risk live people to search for dead bodies".

Chief Strillacci's statements are insensitive and outrageous, and provide further proof why the Connecticut State Legislature needs to take a bold stand to protect the safety of our citizens.

One hundred and fifty years ago the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglas said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand."

The police in Connecticut have the power now, and despite irrefutable evidence; they refuse to acknowledge they have substandard training in DNA collection, the usage of national data banks, and how they respond to a report of a missing adult.

Bill #6113 will change that.

We can no longer allow the police to obstruct efforts to improve their training.

It is time for law enforcement to catch up to the remarkable advancements of science. Passing Bill #6113 will make Connecticut a safer place to live. Although this legislation will not help my son Billy, it will help the thousands of families that will experience the nightmare of a missing loved one in the decades to come.

And for them, and for the safety of all our citizens, the legislators of Connecticut must demand this change.

