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## Spurred by missing Bogota woman 'Patricia's Law' before both houses of legislature

By Christina Rossi

BOGOTA — "Patricia's Law," named for the borough woman who went missing in 2001, has been introduced in the state Senate and Assembly.

State Senator Loretta Weinberg (D-Dist. 37) announced the bill, which she is sponsoring, outside the home of Jim and Patricia Viola on Thursday, Oct. 19.

The proposed bill would improve procedures for handling missing persons' claims and

human remains that are found.

Mr. Viola explained that the idea for the bill began in April 2005 when the federal Department of Justice assembled a legislative model for missing persons' legislation that could be passed by individual states.

The president of Project Jason.org, a national missing persons' organization, sought volunteers from each of the states to shepherd the model through their

## 'Patricia's Law'

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state legislatures.

"I took on New Jersey," Mr. Viola said.

He said the bill was "embraced" by Senator Weinberg, and as well by state Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Dist. 37,) who is sponsoring it in the Assembly.

The proposed bill defines criteria for submitting a missing person's report. "You can't be turned down" by the law enforcement

agencies that receive the report, he said.

It also outlines criteria for the taking of the reports, including categories like whether the missing person is considered high risk, as Mrs. Viola is because she is taking prescription medication for epilepsy.

In addition, the proposed bill details the systems and rules by which missing persons' reports are

handled by state and local law enforcement.

It would also bolster communication between families of the missing and law enforcement, including notifying the families of the existence of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Center for Missing Adults.

These agencies provide free services, including flyers and emotional support, to families.

Mr. Viola said that only 4 to 5 percent of missing persons in New Jersey are listed with the national centers.

The proposed bill would also target the handling and processing of human remains that are discovered, by coordinating information between families and the National Crime Identification system.

As a result of this coordination, law enforcement agencies in different states would be able to "match up" information, so that if Mrs. Viola's DNA were found in

Alaska, for example, it would match the missing person's report filed in New Jersey and make finding her and others easier and faster.

The proposed bill will move to Senate and Assembly committees for consideration and testimony, including Mr. Viola's, and then to the floors of the legislative bodies for anticipated approval. It would

then go to Governor Jon S. Corzine for his signature and become law.

Mr. Viola said there will be a push for residents in all of New Jersey's 21 counties to contact their legislators and urge them to vote in favor of it.

"We want to touch as many senators and assembly members as possible," he said.

Mrs. Viola was last seen on the morning of Feb. 13, 2001 leaving E. Roy Bixby School after she finished a shift working as a volunteer in the school's library.

Police know she reached her Chestnut Avenue home because

she called her mother, who lived two blocks away.

Mr. Viola arrived home in the afternoon and found the house locked, but his wife missing. Her purse, credit cards, identification and epileptic medication were in the house.

There is a \$10,000 reward for information leading to her safe return.

Her website is [www.patriciaviolaissing.homestead.com](http://www.patriciaviolaissing.homestead.com).