

Husband commits to making Patricia's Law a reality

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A bill named for a missing Bogota woman has given law enforcement officials specific instructions to follow when missing persons cases arise. With Gov. Jon Corzine's signature, the state last week enacted Patricia's Law, which requires authorities to immediately collect DNA material and enter it into a national database when a missing person is reported.

With the support of state Sen. Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck) and Attorney General Anne Milgram, among others, Bogota resident Jim Viola developed the law in partnership with local government officials after his wife, Patricia Marie, vanished seven years ago. Patricia was last seen Feb. 13, 2001, leaving her Chestnut Avenue home.

"I began working on this law soon after Pat went missing. I was frustrated that I had no answers and that certain actions weren't take as quickly as they could have been," said Viola, who also worked with 37th District assembly members Valerie Vainieri Huttle and Gordon Johnson.

The governor, speaking during last Wednesday's conference at

Bogota Borough Hall, acknowledged Viola's dedication and commitment to making Patricia's Law a reality.

"I want to thank Jim and his family for their efforts to take a tragedy and turn it into a greater opportunity for our broader society," Corzine said.

"I can only imagine the kind of pain Jim has gone through; this issue definitely needed to be put into public policy. We need to use the power of DNA technology to help locate missing persons."

Under Patricia's Law, law enforcement agencies must accept, without delay, any report of a missing person and cannot refuse to accept such reports for any reason.

One of the more important elements to this legislation states that if a person is missing for more than 30 days, a DNA reference sample must be secured from the family and forwarded to the appropriate agency for analysis and entry into the Combined DNA Index System for Missing Persons. Once the DNA profile is available, the missing persons record in the National Crime Information System is updated to reflect that DNA is available.

In support of Patricia's Law, Milgram last Wednesday

announced the Missing Persons DNA Identification Project. Launched by the New Jersey State Police, the initiative handles long-term missing and unidentified deceased persons cases. The goal of this project, Milgram said, is to cross-match DNA from the state's missing persons database with the DNA from the state's unidentified remains.

"New Jersey takes the national lead for identifying the deceased and missing. We are very proud to be the model for other states to follow," Milgram said.

Viola is equally proud and said that the attorney general's office really "brought everything together" regarding Patricia's Law.

"The State Police project and Patricia's Law are forcing law enforcers to take and use DNA samples to track locations of the missing. This is what we needed to happen; it's great," Viola said.

Viola continues to offer a \$10,000 reward to anyone who can provide information leading to his wife's safe return home.

Visit www.patriciaviolamissing.homestead.com for more information on Patricia Viola's case and for general information on missing persons.



PHOTO/MARK J. BONAMO

Governor Jon Corzine joined Jim Viola and others at Bogota Borough Hall to pass Patricia's Law for missing persons.