

MISSING PERSONS

State approves legislation

Patricia's Law improves timelines in reporting cases

BY ROBIN DECICCO
Staff Writer

Since his wife's disappearance seven years ago, Bogota resident Jim Viola has worked diligently with local government to create an updated version of the Model Missing Persons Legislation, which is now called Patricia's Law, regulations and guidelines focused on improving the way New Jersey agencies handle missing persons cases.

After it was passed in the Senate and the Appropriations Committee, Patricia's Law last week was unanimously approved by the New Jersey General Assembly. The final vote in the Assembly was 80 to 0.

With the support of State Sen. Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck), Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (D-Englewood) and Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Englewood), Gov. Corzine signed the bill on Jan. 7.

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

'It's an amazing feeling to know that there are now more options for families with missing persons.'

Jim Viola

Patricia Viola vanished from her Bogota neighborhood Feb. 13, 2001.

"In the past, I've heard of police officers acting slowly and even ignoring reports of missing persons. Now, under this law, officers must follow a certain protocol when dealing with missing persons cases, which will inevitably help to find missing people quicker and more efficiently," Viola said.

One of the more important elements to this legislative states that if a person is missing for more than 30 days, Patricia's Law requires that a DNA reference sample is 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 will be updated to reflect that DNA is available.

"It's an amazing feeling to know that there are now more options for families with missing persons. Due to 'Patricia's Law,' families will be heard and will receive greater feedback than I ever did," Viola said.

Though Viola is glad that the bill was passed, he admits that it is unfortunate Patricia's Law was not in effect directly after his wife's disappearance. According to Viola, he believes the bill would have led him to additional clues and answers regarding Patricia's whereabouts.

Viola remains hopeful that he will see his wife again. He is offering a \$10,000 reward to anyone who can provide information leading to her safe return home.

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