

Murphy's "Billy's Law" Introduced in the House

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today Democratic Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) and Republican Congressman Ted Poe (TX-2) introduced "Billy's Law," also known as Help Find the Missing Act, to close loopholes in our national missing persons systems.

"The thousands of families across America that wake up every day not knowing the whereabouts of their missing loved one live in every corner of our nation, and they expect Congress to come together to figure out a way to improve the way we handle missing persons cases. I'm thrilled to be working with Connecticut's Senators and Congressman Poe from Texas on this important legislation," said Murphy.

"Having served as a chief felony prosecutor and a felony court judge in Harris County, Texas for over 30 years, I know firsthand the burden that violent crime puts on our communities," said Poe. "The pain is made even worse when families are forced to wait for many months, or years, until they can find closure. Some families never find closure."

After hearing from Janice Smolinski of Cheshire about the nightmare her family endured after their 31-year-old son, Billy, went missing from Waterbury in 2004, Murphy penned "Billy's Law" to help ensure that more families do not encounter the systemic challenges the Smolinskis faced in trying to help law enforcement search for their son.

"Our country is in desperate need of a new missing persons system. I hope legislators find it in their hearts to understand the devastation upon a family when a loved one goes missing. It is unimaginably hard to see that a lack of funding to dedicate to a new technology could make the difference in a missing persons' case," said Smolinksi.

"Billy's Law," introduced by Murphy and Poe last Congress and again today, empowers families and loved ones of the missing to find justice by helping to secure funding for the only federal database for missing persons and unidentified remains that can be cross-searched, accessed and added to by the public - the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). This database enables the loved ones of the missing to search for a match and add invaluable information to the case profile that only they know.

The legislation helps to streamline the reporting process for law enforcement and medical examiners by connecting two major federal missing persons and unidentified remains databases- the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the NamUs. Connecting these databases makes them more comprehensive and more likely to lead to a match between a missing person and unidentified human remains.

"Billy's Law" also creates an incentive grants program to coroners, medical examiners, and law enforcement agencies to help facilitate the reporting of missing persons and unidentified remains to the federal databases. Grants can also be used for training programs on how to correctly use the databases and best handle these cases, and the recipients of these grants must provide a dollar in matching funds for every two dollars in federal funds.

"Billy's Law" builds upon Connecticut's 2007 Law Enforcement and Missing Persons law as it also calls for the issuance of broad recommendations for standards and procedures for law enforcement to follow in dealing with missing persons and unidentified remains.

Last year, Murphy and Poe worked together to secure House passage of the bill, but it was not approved by the Senate. Connecticut Senators Joe Lieberman and Richard Blumenthal will introduce the bill in the Senate.

"By authorizing the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, Billy's Bill will provide these families with a comprehensive resource that will help them to locate loved ones who have disappeared and, in those unfortunate circumstances; provide them a sense of closure," said Lieberman.

"I'm proud to join efforts to help families find and identify their missing loved ones. We owe it to families like Billy's to do everything possible to give law enforcement officials - and members of the public - the tools and resources they need to find the missing and bring them home," said Blumenthal.

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