

Albany pressed to up aid to handicapped

By JOHN M. GREENE
OF OUR ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — The Citizens United for the Handicapped yesterday put before the State Legislature a demand for \$90 million in additional state aid for the next fiscal year.

At a four-hour session in Chancellor's Hall across from the capitol, the group called the \$5 million in additional state aid recommended for patient care in state facilities and Gov. Rockefeller's decision to hold next year's expenditures to \$600 million "totally insufficient to meet the basic patient care needs."

"Less than half the state's total public school population of physically and mentally handicapped children are currently receiving the special educational services to which they are entitled by state law and the Constitution," the resolution read.

The organization wants \$50 million more to be devoted exclusively to patient care services and such other rehabilitative and community alternatives to hospitalization as experience has shown to be necessary and \$40 million earmarked for education funds to be utilized by local school districts exclusively for special educational services.

Included in the resolution is a request that the recently created federal-state task force to look into the mental health and mental retardation facilities add parents and citizen and organization representatives to its membership.

More than 400 persons, representing units from all over the state, attended the session.

They heard Dr. Harvey B. Scribner, chancellor of New York City public schools, urge the state to provide equal opportunity for all children through a weighted formula for health services to the handicapped children and a revision of the state educational law affecting the handicapped with a view toward eliminating discriminatory features and the equitable allotment of funds to support the state mandates.

Dr. Scribner was not able to be present. His statement was read by Dr. Helen M. Feulner, acting assistant superintendent of the city's Board of Education.

"Services to the handicapped in areas where critical needs exist must be made a priority item and be exempt from budget cuts," Dr. Scribner stated. "The children who have already suffered from neglect must be protected from further harm."

Sen. Jack E. Bronston of Queens, recommended that the citizen's group support a special one-year tax bill to get the state over the present emergency in aid to the handicapped.

"I will introduce and support a bill that will give Gov. Rockefeller three alternatives on a one-year basis only with special and absolute earmarking for mental health, mental retardation and physical

handicapped," he said. Bronston suggested a 1.5 per cent increase in the sales tax, an additional bracket on the income tax or a 2 cent additional levy on a pack of cigarettes.

"Funds from these must be used over and above the proposed 1972-73 budget and would represent a crash program to heal the conscience of the state," the senator said.

Bronston said the people of the state would actually support such a program so long as they knew the tax money did not go into additional concrete or monuments but would help cure a social problem they are ashamed exists in the state. "People want to help," he said, "but they want to know that tax money will go into areas that are necessary and not into general funds."

The group also passed a resolution calling for the reinstatement of Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, recently dismissed from Willowbrook State School because they refused to accept a punitive transfer to another institution. The resolution asked that the reinstatement be made pending an investigation by the Department of Mental Hygiene.