

Carey cuts, bolsters Willowbrook \$\$

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ALBANY — Gov. Carey yesterday proposed in his record \$10.6-billion budget for the 1975-76 fiscal year the creation of a special \$16.7-million reserve fund to aid the Willowbrook Developmental Center and other state mental institutions currently involved in lawsuits.

Carey said that \$7.4 million of the total will be funneled directly to Willowbrook, with the balance used to increase staff and improve conditions at the Staten Island facility and nine other developmental centers around the state.

The governor, however, also proposed a nearly \$3.3-million reduction in the state's appropriation for operating costs at Willowbrook, because of a decrease in the institution's patient population and staff over the last year.

The cutback will leave Willowbrook with \$41.7 million in operating funds for the fiscal year beginning April 1 — still the largest expenditure for any of the state's mental health facilities — in addition to some \$16 million proposed for capital improvements at the sprawling institution.

Another \$4.4 million for construction projects is also still available from previous budgets.

Also included in the governor's budget is:

- \$11 million for the South Beach Psychiatric Center, up \$1.4 million from the current fiscal year.

- \$7.6 million for the Arthur Kill Narcotics Rehabilitation Center, an increase of \$81,853.

- \$11.2 million for construction of theater, music, library and instructional buildings at Staten Island Community College.

- \$904,000 in supplemental state money for improvements of the Oakwood Beach sewage treatment plant.

- \$500,000 as part of the state's share for construction of the North Richmond Community Mental Health Center, a division of St. Vincent's Medical Center.

The latter three items are continuing appropriations for projects authorized in previous budgets. Funds for the South Beach and Arthur Kill facilities cover operating costs for the upcoming fiscal year.

Carey said the reduction in operating funds for Willowbrook is a result of reduced patient population, cutbacks in a laundry service contract and modifications in other contracts covering medical care, special therapy and transportation.

He added that the special \$16.7-million reserve fund will be used for direct aid to Willowbrook and to hire 1,368 additional employees for the Department of Mental Hygiene. Some of the money will also be used to improve conditions at facilities run by the agency, he stated.

According to state Budget Bureau figures, the number of

patients at Willowbrook has declined from 3,100 in 1973 to 2,141 last year, under Mental Hygiene's program to reduce the resident population at the facility.

A spokesman for Willowbrook said, however, that there are presently 2,878 residents at the institution.

There were also 3,269 employees at Willowbrook last year — 784 fewer than in 1973 — according to the budget submitted to the Legislature by Carey. The Willowbrook spokesman said about 3,800 persons are currently employed at the institution.

The reductions in patients and employees estimated in the budget are reflected in decreases in the governor's recommended appropriations both for payroll costs and for expenditures for food and other supplies. The new budget proposes \$34,578,000 for "personal services," which includes salaries, and \$7,139,900 for "non-personal services."

The total operating budget recommended for the upcoming fiscal year is \$3,219,973 less than the Legislature authorized for Willowbrook during the current year.

While cutting the operating budget for Willowbrook, Carey called for creation of the \$16,750,500 reserve fund and recommended appropriations for the Department of Mental Hygiene totalling \$989.1 million. That is about \$145 million more than the Legislature approved for the agency in the 1974-75 budget.

The increased budget for the department, Carey said, "represents an increase...that is largely due to higher costs."

"It will also enable the department to meet the potential cost of pending litigation involving the Willowbrook Developmental Center and related facilities," he added. Carey said \$9.4 million of the special reserve fund will be used to improve staffing at institutions currently involved in lawsuits, with the balance going directly to Willowbrook.

In the Willowbrook suit, parents of residents at the institution and other groups are contending that conditions at the facility deprive residents of their constitutional rights. An out-of-court settlement is expected, although a spokesman for Carey said yesterday he did not know when a formal agreement would be announced.

In addition to the operating budget and the special reserve fund, Carey also proposed \$15,908,000 worth of new capital improvements at Willowbrook. The money would be used for air conditioning and other improvements in buildings, and the governor estimated \$3 million of the total could be spent during the coming fiscal year.

Willowbrook currently has \$4,475,882 of capital construction funds which have been previously authorized but which have not been spent. That money is also earmarked for air conditioning and building improvements.

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