

Mental Hygiene split advanced

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The legislature appears likely to approve a proposal stripping the state Department of Mental Hygiene of its responsibility for the care of the mentally retarded.

But Gov. Hugh Carey, who endorsed the concept during his campaign last fall, could end up vetoing the bill now. His new commissioner of mental hygiene, Dr. Lawrence Kolb, is opposed to it, apparently because he thinks it would be too expensive.

The measure, approved by the Senate Thursday on a 45-6 vote and sent to the Assembly, would create a new Office of Mental Retardation in the Executive Department to run the 21 state institutions, programs and activities for the mentally retarded.

The Department of Mental Hygiene now has the responsibility for the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, drug abusers and alcoholics.

And aide to Sen. William Conklin, R-Brooklyn, who sponsored the proposal, predicted quick passage in the Assembly, where Speaker Stanley Steingut, D-Brooklyn, is sponsor of a companion measure.

There are about 535,000 mentally retarded children and adults in the state, Conklin's office said.

In other developments at the Capitol Thursday:

—Senate Majority Leader Warren Anderson and Sen. Norman Levy, R-Nassau, proposed legislation to boost unemployment allowances for heads of families especially hard hit by the recession. They said their plan would increase basic unemployment allowances by 10 per cent for each dependent, up to a maximum of three. The increased benefits would be financed by the unemployment insurance fund.

—The Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus announced introduction of six bills aimed at simplifying voter registration in the state. Assemblymen Arthur Eve, D-Buffalo, chairman of the 20-member caucus, said the cornerstone of the package is a proposal allowing voter registration by mail.

—The state Assembly approved a bill that would make it illegal for landlords to force tenants to pay the landlord's legal fees.

—The Senate approved a measure increasing funeral and death benefits for volunteer firemen killed on duty. The bill would increase maximum funeral expenses from \$750 to \$1,500 and boost lump sum payments to any beneficiaries from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

Conklin's proposal to set up a separate mental retardation agency is aimed at treating the mentally retarded more humanely and in a less institutionalized fashion, said Robert

Maurer, Conklin's executive assistant.

"The reason for a separate office is the failure of the Department of Mental Hygiene over 48 years to substantially implement laws in regard to these children and adults with special needs," Maurer said. "The mentally retarded require an educational or developmental experience which is totally apart from what a psychiatrist does—and the department is run by psychiatrists."