

Ex-director raps Carey plan to split Mental Hygiene Dept.

By ROBERT MIRALDI

The former regional director of the state's mental health bureaucracy yesterday blasted Gov. Carey's proposal that the mammoth state Department of Mental Hygiene be split into separate bureaus for mental health, mental retardation and alcohol-drug abuse.

Dr. Stuart L. Keill, who resigned his state post a year ago and is now an administrator at Nassau County Medical Center, called the Carey proposal "the latest attempt to sabotage human service" programs for the state's handicapped population.

"It will be like slicing some patients into three parts," Dr. Keill said.

Keill said that Dr. Lawrence C. Kolb, the present Department of Mental Hygiene commissioner, has been "undercut at every turn" by Carey who, he said, has attempted to do "what looked good politically" at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Furthermore, Dr. Keill charged, Thomas A. Coughlin, a deputy state commissioner who will head the new mental retardation bureau, is "one of the governor's political hacks" who "happens to have political viability," but has "no recommended background as a mental health professional."

Dr. Keill's criticism was echoed yesterday by a high-ranking department official who asked to remain anonymous. The official called the proposed breakup of the department a "disaster" even though "it may be more politically expedient."

The official speculated that fights between mental health and mental retardation advocacy groups would now increase and, the official said, he feared that mental health programs would be seriously hurt by the emphasis on and money being channeled into state centers for the retarded. The official also criticized Coughlin.

Although state officials and parent groups did not have details on Carey's proposal, most voiced support yesterday for his proposal. Carey has often said that reform of the Department of Mental Hygiene was a top priority in his administration.

Two years ago, however, he vetoed a bill — sponsored by Brooklyn Republican William P. Conklin — which would have split the department much as the proposal yesterday would do. The proposal came in the governor's state of the state message.

Recently Carey has been under pressure to effect the split, mostly because of pending legal action in federal court where three state officials, including Kolb and Coughlin, have been charged with contempt of court for failing to make changes at Willowbrook. The center presently has 2,595 residents.

A trial of the three officials has been set for Feb. 7, but observers have said that the DMH split was a concession to attorneys who have represented parent groups in the Willowbrook case. The observers wondered yesterday if the concessions would cancel the trial.

In Carey's speech yesterday he said the reorganization of the mental health system will "make government more effective without being bigger." Carey said that "disciplined reorganization" could bring about "better services for each of the taxpayers' dollars."

Dr. Keill, who administered mental health and mental retardation programs in the city for five years, said that presently about 30 per cent of the mental health money being spent in the city is wasted on cosmetic programs.

Dr. Keill blamed the waste on state officials who were not professionals. Dr. Keill said he felt Coughlin, a former state trooper, could not properly make medical, programmatic decisions.

The Department of Mental Hygiene is the country's largest mental health bureaucracy. It has 63,000 employees; 29 psychiatric centers with 36,000 inpatients and 84,000 outpatients, and 21 developmental centers with 19,300 inpatients and 9,000 outpatients.

Other officials had these reactions yesterday:

State Sen. John J. Marchi: "We hope this revised policy signals stepped-up progress in improvement of conditions

at Willowbrook."

Sen. Conklin: The Brooklyn Republican "welcomed" the governor's initiative but said it was "impossible to make a judgment...without greater definition."

Dr. Kolb: The state commissioner voiced "strong support" for the concept of "three functionally independent agencies" which were "so wisely recommended" by the governor.

Joseph T. Weingold: The director of the state Association for Retarded Children "applauded" the governor and said his agency has been seeking the split for 12 years. He said that the task now is to rewrite the state mental hygiene law to "give state officials the instruments of change."

Morton Posner: The director of the Federation of Parents Organizations said the proposal raises more questions than answers." He added that he didn't like the idea of "making clear distinctions between disabilities" and said the split would "tend to create a number of problems."

Chris A. Hansen: The attorney for Willowbrook parents called it a "major improvement" to have Dr. Kolb "out of the picture." But, he said, "if all they are doing is changing the signs on the doors it won't make a difference."