

# Connelly to chair mental health committee

By PETER HARRIGAN

Assembly Speaker Stanley Steingut yesterday announced the appointment of Democratic Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly of West Brighton as chairman of the Assembly's Mental Health and Hygiene Committee.

Mrs. Connelly, a five-year veteran of the Assembly, is believed to be the first female Democrat to head a legislative committee. She replaces Assemblyman James McCabe, D-Johnson City, who was named chairman of the Local Government's Committee.

"I'm delighted at my selection, not

only for myself but for all of Staten Island," Mrs. Connelly said, adding that she was privately informed of her appointment by Steingut Thursday. "I think mental health is one of the major issues on Staten Island, especially since we have the Willowbrook Developmental Center."

A member of the Mental Health and Hygiene Committee since its inception in 1975, Mrs. Connelly said she expects to be actively involved with Gov. Carey's proposal to split up the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

Under the governor's plan, formally unveiled in his State of the State mes-

sage last Wednesday, the sprawling agency will be broken up into separate units responsible for those with developmental disabilities and for those suffering from alcoholism or drug-related problems.

"I imagine the first thing we'll do is to hold hearings on the governor's plan," Mrs. Connelly said. "I'm really looking forward to chairing the committee, because mental health is going to be a very important topic this year."

Mrs. Connelly said she felt she was entitled to a committee chairmanship because of her seniority in the Assembly, and admitted she discussed the pos-

sibility of heading the mental health panel with Steingut's aides last Wednesday.

"From what I understand, they labored over these assignments for a long time," the assemblywoman said in reference to a meeting of Steingut and his aides which ran late into Wednesday night. "I gather they felt I was qualified and able to handle the committee."

As chairman of a committee, Mrs. Connelly will be entitled to a larger office in Albany and to a larger staff. She will also receive a \$5,000 "lulu," or compensation in lieu of expenses, in addition to her base salary of \$23,500.



Elizabeth Connelly