

Editorial page

Our opinion

Costly scrimp on research

Major cutbacks in the Department of Mental Hygiene's research programs have been averted in the new state budget but state-run research facilities continue to receive only a tiny share of the department's annual spending allocation.

During the new fiscal year, the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook and other state research centers will be given a total of \$16.5 million for their work, about the same amount they received last year.

In our view, that's being penny-wise and pound-foolish.

The Department of Mental Hygiene, which now spends about \$1 billion a year, is developing ambitious plans to remove tens of thousands of individuals from the Willowbrook Developmental Center and similar institutions and place them in community-oriented facilities over the next few years.

Such a program is long overdue, but we think it should be carried out in conjunction with stepped-up research aimed at studying the basic causes of mental retardation. It seems absolutely pointless to spend huge sums of money caring for institutionalized individuals while giving what amounts to token funding to potentially important research work.

A recent state audit of the Institute for Basic Research sharply criticized the facility's administrators for utilizing only about 75 per cent of the available space at the center.

It was up to the Institute's director, Dr. Henry Wisniewski, to point out what the audit did not. The simple fact is that the Institute is not being used to its fullest potential simply because it has never been given enough money to hire scien-

tists and to buy equipment to fill up its laboratories.

With the state spending nearly one-tenth of its total budget on mental hygiene, there is no reason why research facilities should not be given more money than they now receive. The total research budget amounts to a piddling .16 of 1 per cent of the Department of Mental Hygiene's appropriation.

There is also no reason why valuable space at the Island Institute should be permitted to remain vacant.

We hope Gov. Carey, Mental Hygiene Commissioner Lawrence Kolb and legislative leaders will see the need for more money for mental retardation research and take the necessary action to guarantee that additional funds will be forthcoming this year.