

Our Opinion

# Handicapping aid programs

A 30 per cent slash in the operating budgets for programs which aid the handicapped, including centers operated by United Cerebral Palsy and Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children in this borough, is far too great a cutback, and our state legislators should strive to make sure adequate funds are provided in the supplemental budget for the next fiscal year.

Hundreds of agencies in the state will be affected if the cuts are not eliminated or at least lessened soon. That means that developmentally disabled people won't be provided the workshops and other assistance which makes them more capable of helping themselves.

In addition, it has been pointed out by Mrs. Joan Hodum, executive director of Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, that Willowbrook

Developmental Center, with a resident population of 2,500 now, has been under court order to reduce its population by 90 per cent by 1981, and yet the cuts mean that agencies like hers just can't meet the growing number of people that would consign to their care. "In a time that de-institutionalization is being stressed," Vincent Sclafani, director of the United Cerebral Palsy unit in Port Richmond, declared, "these cuts seem rather inconsistent."

We agree. And we think it's especially ironic that the Legislature has increased its own budget this year.

Gov. Carey himself has said he is in favor of plans to halve the number of retarded persons living in developmental centers like Willowbrook by development of a sys-

tem of locally sponsored residential and treatment programs. Yet if that idea is to be carried out then it is essential that community agencies serving the handicapped and retarded be able to not only continue but enlarge their services.

Likewise, it has been anticipated that the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare will agree that funds presently allocated to institutional care can be converted to use in returning patients to their own communities and providing the services they need on the local level.

After all, it was a federal judge who decreed the cutback in developmental center population.

The disabled are human beings, and they deserve humane treatment.