

Mental Hygiene reorganization to split Willowbrook, South Beach

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

Gov. Carey yesterday approved a sweeping reorganization of the Department of Mental Hygiene under which the Willowbrook Developmental Center and the South Beach Psychiatric Center will be run by different semi-autonomous agencies.

The plan is designed to improve the efficiency of state services to New York's 1.5 million mentally disabled citizens by breaking up the massive DMH bureaucracy into specialized units and by emphasizing community-based programs over institutionalized care.

Carey signed into law a package of 12 bills effectively splitting the department into three offices — Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health, and Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse.

Under the reorganization, which must be carried out by April 1 of next year, Willowbrook will be run by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. South Beach will be assigned to the Office of Mental Health.

In addition, local governments will be encouraged to take over the delivery of mental health services over a period of years through community-based programs such as half-way houses and hostels. The state will continue to provide the funding, however.

Carey called the reorganization "one of the most important achievements" of the 1977 legislative session and said the plan will enable mental health officials to "tailor programs more specifically" to the needs of DMH clients.

Technically, the three offices will still be a part of DMH, but the department will no longer have a head and each new unit will exercise complete control over its activities. Carey will appoint

the office chiefs, subject to confirmation of the Senate.

The plan was hammered out after much haggling by the Legislature in the final days before the recess last month. It represents a compromise of the original proposal submitted by Carey.

The governor's initial plan drew much criticism because it would have combined services for alcoholics and drug addicts under one agency headed by a single official. Experts in programs for alcoholics predicted that their clients would get lost in the shuffle.

In the final version of the reorganization, the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse will have separate directors for the two types of care.

Also yesterday, Carey signed the following other bills into law:

☐ A measure requiring "Medicaid

mills" to register with the state Health Department and to meet "quality care" standards. The bill is designed to combat alleged Mafia protection rackets in the facilities.

☐ A bill allowing trucks up to 40 tons to travel state highways. Until now, the limit was 71,000 pounds. The measure is expected promote conservation of fuel and reduce the cost of trucking goods.

☐ A measure repealing the 80-year-old ban on drilling for natural gas in Lake Erie. According to Carey's office, the reserves in the lake could supply the state with up to 13 per cent of its gas needs and protect as many as 59,000 jobs.

☐ A bill extending the Department of Corrections' "work-release" program for prison inmates for a year with restrictions to cut down on abuses.