

Staten Island Advance

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Island to get service agency

Staten Island may soon have its own Borough Developmental Services Office — a new arm of the state Department of Mental Hygiene that would coordinate services for the mentally retarded living here.

A draft agreement for the agency — approved yesterday by the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council and sent on to the city and state — indicates the office would be run by the director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, as the state had wanted. In turn, a deputy director of Willowbrook, as well as other administrators

there, would be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the 1,700-bed institution, Elin M. Howe, Willowbrook's acting director, said yesterday.

The city Department of Mental Health had expressed concern about the developmental center director acting as head of the new office, preferring instead co-directors — one from Willowbrook and the other a representative of voluntary agencies serving the retarded.

But under the proposed agreement, expected to be approved within four to six weeks, voluntary, not-for-profit organizations would probably gain a sub-

stantial role in local program planning.

The agreement designates the Staten Island regional council's executive board as the executive board of the retardation office. The council, an advisory group to the city Department of Mental Health, would retain its identity.

Under the terms of an order signed in federal court in March, each borough was mandated to have set up a services office by Oct. 1. Only one borough has done so to date, while the four others have been attempting to develop them.

The regional council agreement states that it sees the new Island agency as a

consortium, "involving every facet of the public and private sectors delivering or funding services to the mentally retarded and other developmentally disabled persons.

"It provides a local community the focal point for all programs," the agreement continues, and adds that "through its planning and coordinating role, (the office) will provide an opportunity for expediting the development of programs and services."

The new programs the BDSO advances — including development of group homes and day workshops for the

disabled — would continue to be run by state and local government agencies. The agency would give the locality to say which programs it wants.

The regional retardation council accepted the agreement yesterday at a monthly meeting with virtual unanimity. The clashes had come before in the several months of work gone into the planning of the office.

In other matters yesterday, Elin M. Howe, who would presumably be the head of the BDSO if it is approved, told the council members of her proposal to lease the Willowbrook store at 281 Richmond Street in Port Richmond.

She explained that the store would be used as a center housing a vocational shop and other programs for retarded persons residing in Port Richmond, as well as a "halfway house" for those preparing to leave Willowbrook and enter community life.

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