

The Carey budget:

Willowbrook cut \$8M; staff slashed in half

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ALBANY — Gov. Carey's 1978 budget calls for an \$8 million slash in funding for Willowbrook Developmental Center and a 50 percent reduction in the staff and the resident population at the institution for the retarded.

Under the proposed budget, Willowbrook's operating budget would be cut to \$40.7 million, down from last year's allocation of almost \$49 million. It would be the biggest budget reduction since the 1975 court order to scale down the massive institution to a 250-bed community facility by 1982.

The governor's budget also provides that the work force at Willowbrook be cut to 2,006 employees by March 31, 1979. The center now employs about 4,000 state workers.

At the same time, the number of residents at Willowbrook would be reduced to 1,100 as a part of the state's program to place the retarded in smaller community facilities. The center, which housed over 6,000 in the early 1970s, currently has about 1,800 residents in the state-run buildings at the complex.

The reductions would be giant steps toward the implementation of the landmark 1975 decision, which resulted from an out of court settlement between the Carey and a coalition of parent organizations and civil rights groups who brought suit to improve conditions at Willowbrook.

The proposals to partially dismantle the center is certain to meet opposition from the employees' civil service union, which is already bitter over the state Department of Mental Hygiene's decision to allow United Cerebral Palsy of New York City to take control of Willowbrook's seven-building baby complex.

The budget reductions may also be opposed by the Willowbrook Review Panel, which was formed to oversee the state's plan to carry out the 1975 consent decree. Composed of former plaintiffs in the court fight against Willowbrook, the panel has been consistently critical of the Department's of Mental Hygiene's efforts to phase out the institution.

Among other things, the panel has charged that the state has developed plans to under-budget Willowbrook while failing to provide alternative community facilities, including half-way houses and hostels, for the placement of residents scheduled to leave the institution.

In other Island budget items, the state spending plan for fiscal 1978 would also fatten up the funding allocation for the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility by \$310,000 to a total of \$8.584 million so an additional 100 inmates could be brought to the Charleston prison. The minimum security prison now has 650 convicts.

The increase is a part of a plan to accommodate the continued growth of the state's prison population. In the last year alone, the number of prisoners in New York jails has jumped from 17,681 to 20,336, according to the budget text. This year, the prisons are expected to house almost 1,500 more inmates.

The problem has been aggravated by delays in the negotiations of a contract with the city to make room for the overflow inmates in municipal jails, the budget text says.

The budget further calls for a \$842,000 increase in funding for the South Beach Psychiatric Center to \$15.9 million. The hike comes with an overall increase in state mental health allocations of \$31.4 million to improve staff ratios and upgrade a variety of programs at state psychiatric centers.

In addition, the Island mental institution which employs 950 workers and treats 340 inpatients and 3,825 outpatients, was allocated \$94,000 to equip a "safe unit" to house violent patients, and another \$139,000 to renovate bathrooms at the center.

Absent from the budget was a recommendation that the governor to allocate \$200,000 to pay the operating expenses of the Snug Harbor Cultural Center. But the budget for the New York Council on the Arts, which funded the Livingston institution last year, would increase from \$29.3 million to \$36.6 million under Carey's spending proposals.

Council officials, have already indicated they would look favorably on a new funding application from Snug Harbor.

The Carey budget would also change the formula requiring the Arts Council to allocate at least 55 cents per person in each state county. The new formula would distribute the money strictly on the basis of each county's population in relation to the total number of state residents.

The proposed budget for fiscal 1978 contains the following additional Island items:

¶ \$152,000 for the renovation of Heritage House in New Brighton as a community center dedicated to the late Martin Luther King Jr. The money would be carried over from last year.

¶ \$4.4 million for the College of Staten Island — a decrease of \$1.3 million from last year. The reduction "reflects budget and enrollments projections supplied" by City University officials, according to Carey.

¶ \$8.8 million for a variety of capital improvements at Willowbrook, including the installation of air conditioning, wheelchair ramps, and overhaul of the electrical system in certain sections of the complex.

¶ \$152,000 for the state share of federal programs to bolster the South Shore of the Island and parts of Long Island from erosion. The programs have been in a state of limbo since the late 1960s.

¶ \$4.7 million allocated for the renovation of Snug Harbor that was included in the supplemental budget last year.