

City asks state to pay SSI for Willowbrook discharges

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Advance Staff Writer

ALBANY — Deputy Mayor Ronay Menschel yesterday asked the state to take over all Supplemental Security Income payments going to residents of community mental health facilities who have been discharged from Willowbrook Developmental Center and other large state institutions.

Speaking for Mayor Koch at yesterday's budget hearings, Mrs. Menschel also testified that the city will need increased state participation in a variety of other programs — including home relief, highway maintenance and day care — to close this year's \$457 million budget gap.

Her message, however, got a cool reception from at least one of the presiding officials at the hearing, Assembly Ways and Means Chairman Arthur Kremer, D-Nassau, who was obviously miffed that Koch failed to come to Albany to make the city's plea in person.

Kremer listened politely and then, instead of commenting on Mrs. Menschel's statement, urged her to ask Koch to come to the Capitol as soon as possible. "We don't want to waste time in getting an idea of what he likes and doesn't like in the budget," Kremer remarked.

Mrs. Menschel explained the mayor stayed in New York City to prepare for his meeting with President Carter in Washington today to discuss the financial plan the city submitted to federal officials two weeks ago.

The deputy mayor testified that the savings from a state takeover of SSI costs would save the city \$2 million this year, when 1,600 mental health patients will be released into community facilities, and \$5 million in 1982, when the number of discharges will rise to 4,200.

Many of this year's community placements, she acknowledged after her testimony, will come from Willowbrook Developmental Center, from which state officials plan to discharge approximately 600 residents to comply with a 1975 federal court order.

Mrs. Menschel told Kremer and Senate Finance Chairman John J. Marchi, the other presiding hearing officer, that the residents qualify for SSI as soon as they are put in the smaller facilities. Since SSI is not considered welfare, its costs are shared by the city and the state.

She also proposed that the state Department of Health reimburse fringe benefit costs as the Department of Social Services does.

Mrs. Menschel further testified that the Koch administration has developed its own austerity program calling for the elimination of 20,000 city jobs over the next four years through attrition, more city service reductions, and a management plan to cut the annual rise in agency operation costs from the present rate of 6 percent to 3 percent.

Kremer's terse reaction to Mrs. Menschel came minutes after an impromptu press conference in the hearing room at which reporters questioned him about reports that city-state budget negotiations have bogged down as a result of Koch's demands for \$200 million in aid a year from Albany with no strings attached.

The Ways and Means Committee chairman testily asserted that he and other state officials "don't want to lock ourselves into a recurring aid" agreement with the city. He also confirmed that the city and the state have not come to a bottom-line figure for assistance in this year's budget.

Marchi, however, said he would support some form of recurring aid for the city if it meant "putting New York on a better financial footing."

Carey has said his 1978 budget calls for some \$300 million in more aid for the city, most of it in the form of categorical allocations to the education assistance formula and other programs.

Bill would drop Willowbrook tag

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — The Assembly yesterday passed a bill to change the name of the Willowbrook Developmental center to the Staten Island Developmental Center.

The bill was sponsored by Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, who believes the new designation will help the troubled institution for the retarded shed its image of overcrowding, filth and unexplained deaths.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where Mrs. Connelly hopes it will be supported by Sen. John J. Marchi.