

# Mental Hygiene aide blasts Carey no-fund institutional transfers

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

Mental Hygiene Deputy Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin today sharply criticized Gov. Carey's budget for mandating massive resident transfers from Willowbrook Developmental Center and other big institutions for the retarded without beefing up funding for community-based programs.

Testifying before the Legislature's fiscal committees in Albany, Coughlin lauded the plan to phase out the large centers by placing their residents in community facilities — such as hostels, halfway houses and day care workshops.

But he said Carey's proposed 1978 budget would not provide enough money for the local governments and voluntary agencies who operate the community facilities to both absorb the additional clients and take care of mentally retarded persons living at home and awaiting admission into small-scale programs.

"I must honestly say that the one significant shortcoming in this budget is that, although we expect local governments to assist us in developing a sophisticated network of community-based support services, we have not adequately funded them to do what we ask," Coughlin declared.

Coughlin's statement represents his first public show of dissatisfaction with the controversial plan to dismantle the state's developmental centers. It requires 450 of Willowbrook's 1,650 residents to be sent to community facilities this year.

Parents groups, meanwhile, have also charged that the plan lacks adequate funding and have requested a moratorium on all transfers from the institutions.

Coughlin testified that it was "foolish to assume" that the community programs would expand their services without a commensurate increase in assistance from the state.

The assistance shortfall, Coughlin testified, "will not only make our placement goals more difficult to achieve but more importantly it will not provide for sufficient funding for clients who have never been institutionalized."

Under Carey's budget, the state would pay 100 percent of the cost of placing and caring for a former resident of Willowbrook or another state developmental center in a community program.

The budget also calls for some hikes in the assistance formula to local governments and voluntary agencies operating the small facilities. For the most part, however, the reimbursement rate for maintaining mentally retarded persons in community programs would remain at 50 percent.

Thus, mental hygiene officials say, the governor's spending plan would encourage the operators of community facilities to cater to the transferees, freezing out, in some cases, the non-institutional applicants. These prospective clients would in turn have to be put in places like Willowbrook, the officials say.

The reductions in the resident population at Willowbrook are being carried out under a 1975 federal court decision in which the state was ordered to scale down the center to a 250-bed facility for Staten Islanders only by 1981.

As a result of the court action, the state worked out its own five-year plan to phase out its vast system for "warehousing" the mentally retarded in big institutions. Coughlin told the fiscal committees that 2,500 of the state's remaining 19,000 developmental center residents will be placed in smaller facilities this year.

"There is an even more compelling reason for us to work diligently toward this end that is quite simply our professional and humanitarian responsibility for doing what is right," he testified.

Coughlin, head of the Division of Mental Retardation Services, added that, except for the "bit of negativism" about funding for community facilities, he was generally pleased with the budget and "looked forward to the coming year with great enthusiasm."