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Marchi \$\$ would halt Willowbrook layoffs

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — State Sen. John J. Marchi said yesterday that he will propose a \$4 million addition to the Department of Mental Hygiene's budget to prevent layoffs as a result of Gov. Carey's planned cutbacks at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

In a related development, meanwhile, another Republican, Sen. Frank Padavan of Queens, chairman of the Mental Hygiene Committee, attacked Carey's budget for the Office of Mental Health, claiming that the governor's much heralded \$1.4 million increase for the agency consisted mostly of civil service pay hikes.

Padavan also revealed that Carey's proposed budget calls for 570 temporary layoffs at the state's psychiatric centers to keep the office from rolling up a \$4.6 million deficit. The employees would be fired in October and then rehired in April, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

A spokesman for Marchi said that, according to the estimates of the Senate Finance Committee chairman's fiscal experts, the state would have to lay

off about 300 employees at Willowbrook to carry out the governor's proposal to reduce the resident population from 1,600 to 1,200 and the work force from 3,500 to 1,300 this year.

Under the Carey plan, some of the 1,200 state jobs to be eliminated would be absorbed by United Cerebral Palsy Inc., which runs several buildings at Willowbrook. Most of the other 900 positions would be dropped through an attrition program implemented by "careful advance planning," according to the governor.

Marchi, however, said he had "seen no evidence of any advance planning" and explained he will propose a \$4 million amendment to the governor's department budget to "insure that not one employee will be laid off for lack of adequate funding."

The governor's proposed reductions at Willowbrook would be to comply with a 1975 federal court order forcing the state to scale down the institution to a 250-bed community facility by 1981. Marchi insisted, however, that "compromise should not be accelerated at the expense of patient care and the possible

loss of dedicated staff."

According to the spokesman, Marchi envisages the state using the additional \$4 million to contract out the services of the leftover 300 employees to UCP or to transfer them to other Mental Hygiene Department facilities.

Padavan, in a letter to Carey, sharply criticized the governor for allegedly reneging on a promise to proceed with the reorganization of the Department of Mental Hygiene without cutting back staff levels. The 570 layoffs at the end of the fiscal year, the Queens Republican pointed out, would in fact represent a staffing decrease.

The senator told Carey his budget was "an attempt to deceive the public and disdains the need" for quality mental treatment. "I deeply regret, therefore, that...I cannot in good conscience recommend its approval," Padavan added.

It was not immediately clear if any of the layoffs would occur at South Beach Psychiatric Center. The budget text did not go into that kind of detail.

Padavan said that about \$23 million of the increase in Carey's proposed budget for the Mental Health Department

would go for mandated salary hikes, leaving only \$8 million for expanded services. "Furthermore the \$8 million increase is in actuality a \$4.6 million decrease in inpatient staffing," the senator charged.

According to the budget text, the layoffs would save \$3.6 million in straight salary costs and \$1 million in overtime.

The Legislature passed a reorganization plan for the Department of Mental Hygiene last year. As of April 1, the mammoth agency will be divided into three independent agencies — the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Drug Abuse and Alcohol Addiction Services.

Padavan also said that, according to recent testimony by Dr. James Prevost, the nominee for mental health commissioner, Carey's budget may have underestimated the office's patient load for the next fiscal year by 400 or 500 persons.

Meanwhile, Padavan said, New York ranks 32 out of the 50 states in staff-to-patient ratios at mental hospitals.