

Agency triples pot in mental health advertising war

ALBANY, N.Y. (UPI) — A \$250,000 advertising campaign being launched by the Department of Mental Hygiene to educate the public about the mentally ill has come under attack as an expensive effort to improve the department's image.

The 300,000-member Civil Service Employees Association Thursday issued a statement calling the DMH publicity program "a whitewash," to counter the union's \$75,000 campaign against dumping of mental patients into communities.

The union has charged that mental patients are being discharged from state mental institutions without adequate preparation for life on the outside, in a budget-trimming program.

"DMH ought to be using that money to create adequate community services instead of a whitewash," a union statement said.

But a spokesman for Commissioner James Prevost said the funds had been made available under a federal grant program to educate the public about the mentally ill in communities where deinstitutionalization is underway.

The ad contract has been awarded to a Washington, D.C., public relations firm, Porter, Novelli and Associates. The department spokesman said three New York firms had been asked to develop proposals for the campaign, but the Washington firm had been chosen. The firm specializes in health-related clients, he said.

The spokesman said plans for the ad campaign had been drawn up in December, before the CSEA anti-dumping drive got underway.

Sen. Frank Padavan, who heads the Senate Mental Health Committee, said he had only learned about the ad campaign through news reports and said his committee would look into how flexible use of the federal funds was.