

Transfer of ex-Island patients OK'd

By BRUCE ALPERT

The state Hospital Review and Planning Council approved yesterday a plan to transfer 160 former Staten Island Developmental Center residents to a privately run facility. The approval followed a noisy demonstration by state workers who say the program's \$14-million-a-year price tag is not justified.

The near-unanimous approval of the 31-member council paves the way for

the transfer of the mentally retarded patients, now living in the Gouverneur unit of Manhattan Developmental Center, to Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital in East Harlem.

The program, to be operated by the Mental Retardation Institute of New York Medical College, will receive a Medicaid reimbursement rate of \$90,000 a patient yearly, three times higher than that granted state institutions.

Patricia Cook, chairman of the state

council, said members moved quickly to approve the transfer because of unsafe conditions at the Gouverneur unit and the need to provide "intensive" services to the 160 residents, who the state concedes have been neglected since their transfer from then Willowbrook State School 14 years ago.

The proposal has been before the council less than two months and one

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member said that other projects have taken as long as a year to be placed on the agenda for a vote.

Civil Service Employees Association President William L. McGowan, who headed a delegation of 200 state workers that demonstrated outside of the council meeting room, charged the proposal was rushed through to avoid public scrutiny of the program's cost.

McGowan, joined by city union chief Victor Gotbaum at a morning news conference, said the proposal was a move by the Carey administration to help bail out financially troubled New York Medical College, which was bankrupt when the Archdiocese of New York took it over in January.

"It's a sham, a railroad job," McGowan said. "Normal procedures were not followed in this case. Many steps have apparently been bypassed in order to get this item on the agenda of the State Hospital Review and Planning Council at this time."

Gotbaum, director of District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, said the joint protest between his union and state workers marked the beginning of a new coalition sparked by CSEA's decision last month to affiliate with the AFL-CIO.

In a joint statement, Gotbaum and McGowan said the proposal would cost city taxpayers \$3.5 million a year, or 25 percent of the program's annual cost. At state facilities, including Gouverneur, they said the cost is borne solely by the state and federal governments.

"That's one of the issues we are concerned about," said Gotbaum before joining state workers, including employees at the Staten Island Developmental Center, on the picket line in front of the Manhattan office building housing the council meeting. "Three and a half million dollars could mean 3,000 jobs."

Thomas A. Coughlin, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said the plan will go forward despite the protests of Gouverneur employees, who he said, all have been guaranteed jobs at other state institutions.

"Since this move has been planned for many months and was fully explained to all Gouverneur employees when I personally visited the facility a few weeks ago, I can only assume that this demonstration is another attempt by CSEA to place their own self ambitions above the very serious medical needs of a group of severely handicapped, non-ambulatory people," Coughlin said.

The commissioner said the high cost for the program was justified by the tremendous needs of the Gouverneur resi-

dents. "After thorough clinical evaluations, it was determined that only by providing a temporary rehabilitative hospital program could we hope to give these children and young adults even the smallest opportunity of reaching their potential as human beings," he said.

Coughlin and Richard Berman, director of the state Health Department's Office of Health System's Management, also denied union charges that the retarded residents are being moved from one structurally unsound facility to another. McGowan said that a recent Health Department survey found Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital to be environmentally deficient and a fire and safety hazard.

Berman said state inspectors only found minor violations at Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital. Those violations, he said, will be corrected before the retarded residents enter the facility.

Dr. Margaret J. Giannini, director of the Westchester-based Mental Retardation Institute, said the residents, between 13 and 39 years old, could begin moving into Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital May 15.

The Manhattan hospital, meanwhile, will continue to operate as an acute-care facility at least until the end of the year, but its capacity will be reduced from 400 beds to 208, according to hospital officials. Future plans for the hospital are uncertain, they say.