

Review panel member to oversee 6 retardation centers

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Jennifer L. Howse, executive director of a panel that continues to battle the state over conditions at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, is set to join the opposition on Monday.

A spokesman for the Willowbrook Review Panel, the court-mandated committee charged with monitoring the institution, confirmed yesterday that the 34-year-old Miss Howse will leave the review panel to become the overseer of six state mental retardation facilities in the New York City-Long Island area.

More important, Miss Howse, who has held the \$35,000-a-year panel job since its creation by a 1975 federal court order, will be responsible for ensuring those institutions are virtually emptied by the early 1980s — in keeping with a New York State plan to return retarded persons back to their hometowns.

Officials of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities refused last night to confirm reports that Miss Howse, who holds a doctorate in language development, would assume the office's associate commissionership — a post paying \$46,300 a year.

Sources, however, said Miss Howse's appointment is all but certain, needing only the generally pro forma approval of the state Budget Division.

Jerome Gavin, the spokesman for the Willowbrook Review Panel, said last night that Kathleen Schwaninger, an educator specializing in mental retardation, already had been chosen "unanimously" by panel members to replace Miss Howse as executive director.

The seven-member panel is "pleased" Miss Howse will assume the new position because "it will ensure that all the

work she has done for the past three years will not go down the drain."

He also said that the panel, which monitors the Island institution and reports its findings to Brooklyn Federal Court, "regrets losing Miss Howse because she has done an excellent job. They feel, however, she can make a very important contribution in her new job."

Miss Howse, a long-time advocate of placing retarded persons into small, community facilities, was unavailable for comment last night.

Her new job will give her responsibility over the planning and monitoring of all state-operated and supported services for the retarded throughout the city and Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Miss Howse replaces Michael Mascari, who served as acting associate commissioner since last December.

Meanwhile, Mascari is expected to be named an assistant commissioner of mental retardation, working jointly for both the city Department of Mental Health and Retardation and the state Office of Mental Retardation.

This dual role is unprecedented, and sources said the appointment aims at promoting better coordination between city and state retardation services, which are often criticized as fragmented and duplicative.

Mascari's salary - \$39,500 a year — will be paid by the state.

In his new job, Mascari will participate with consumer and provider groups in the effort to provide community-based services for the city's mentally retarded.

Miss Howse, who has served as a consultant to the Kennedy Foundation and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, moved over to the panel from Florida, where she headed aspects of the state's division of retardation.

For the past three years, she has been considered the review panel's mainstay. Her communications to Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin were often critical of Coughlin's handling of the Island institution's affairs.