

# Willowbrook parent opposes plan to cut back UCP control

By BRUCE ALPERT

The president of a parent group at the Staten Island Developmental Center yesterday said that the return of three of the institution's living units to state control would not be "in the best interests" of the residents.

Anthony Pinto, president of the Willowbrook Benevolent Society, called the state proposal a "political move" designed to win Gov. Carey support from the union representing state workers. He predicted that the plan would never win required federal court approval.

State Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin said last week that he would ask Brooklyn Federal court Judge John R. Bartels for permission to transfer a portion of the United Cerebral Palsy Association complex at the Willowbrook institution to state control. State officials said that excessive absenteeism, lethargy and lack of leadership plagued the three buildings and resulted in "inappropriate service" to approximately 200 mentally retarded persons.

The three buildings — staffed by UCP-

hired supervisors and state-hired therapy aides under a so-called shared-staff agreement — are among seven turned over to UCP last September in an effort to improve conditions at the massive state institution.

Pinto, in an interview yesterday, said that state workers — not UCP — were responsible for the poor level of services being provided at the three buildings.

"The reasons for the problems at the three buildings have been widespread absenteeism on the part of state workers and an inability of UCP to discipline the state workers under the civil service system," Pinto said. "We will vehemently oppose any attempt to place the buildings back under state control."

Cora Hoffman, a spokeswoman for Coughlin, said that the commissioner believes a switch to state control is the best and "quickest" way to end the confusion that she says currently exists at the three shared-staff buildings. She said that state workers do not know whether they should answer to UCP supervisors or fellow state workers.

"There was no political considerations involved in his decision," Ms. Hoffman said. "He just felt that he could no longer delay taking action if the residents were to receive the level of care to which they are entitled."

Pinto said that his group, however, favors a complete takeover of the three buildings by UCP, with the agency replacing state employees with UCP workers, who are not affiliated with any union.

"There would be no need for layoffs," Pinto said. "We can show that the state workers are needed in state-operated buildings at the center, where there are serious shortages."

Ms. Hoffman said a switch to complete UCP control of the three buildings would undoubtedly result in a union court challenge that would delay such a move.

In addition, she said that layoffs of state workers might be required under such a plan. Coughlin has promised no layoffs at the Staten Island Developmental Center as a result of the state contract with UCP.