

# 2nd panel sees need to control group homes

By ROBERT MIRALDI

New York State should establish a central agency to coordinate the location of group homes so communities would not become oversaturated with residential facilities for the increasing number of persons who need community-based treatment.

That is the conclusion of a private social service-related agency — the second agency to conclude that a central clearinghouse is needed to balance the interests of communities with those of persons in need of care.

In an 85-page report, the Community Service Society of New York echoed the sentiments of the Citizens Committee for Children, which last year warned that inequitable distribution of group homes could threaten attempts to provide for needed facilities.

On Staten Island's North Shore in particular, residents have complained that the combination of nursing, adult, and group homes for the retarded, the mentally ill and maladjusted children has "oversaturated" the area.

Throughout New York City, however, the problem of saturation has been a constant thorn in the side of planners who have been attempting to place retarded residents of the former Willowbrook Developmental Center into small, residential facilities. Communities have pointed to other non-related facilities already existing and have called for a halt to placement.

Community board members on Staten Island have complained that their attempts to decide on approvals for group homes are often done in a vacuum: How many group facilities does Staten Island eventually need, they ask.

The essence of the Community Service Society report, a copy of which has been delivered to Gov. Carey, is that unless the state develops a coordinating mechanism, that valid question cannot be answered and proper planning cannot be done.

The report suggests that:

□ Minimum and maximum limits on numbers of facilities should be established for communities.

□ Certain types of group homes should be allowed in a community "as of right," assuming the community has not reached its maximum.

□ A fair-share formula should be evolved, taking into consideration what already exists in the community and the number of persons in need of care that the community has produced.

Last year a bill which would have created a state commission to coordinate the growing network of community-based group homes was defeated in the state Assembly. Chances are it will be introduced again this session because, for example, in the accelerated placement of retarded persons from Willowbrook into group homes, communities continue to slow the process with vocal, sometimes violent, opposition.

Part of the reason for the opposition, the report asserts, is that adequate planning has not taken place. The City Planning Department, in fact, has never publicly addressed the problem of locating small treatment facilities in residential neighborhoods.

Presently there are six state agencies which are responsible for developing small group homes. They are the Department of Mental Hygiene, Division for Youth, Department of Correctional Services, Board of Social Welfare, Department of Social Services and the Drug Abuse Control Commission.

The regional office of the Mental Hygiene Department has been attempting to coordinate its choice of locations for group homes with sites which already exist in communities. However, it has no veto power over other agencies, and there is little indication that agencies consult each other over site locations.

The report suggests a mechanical formula for apportioning group homes. It concedes that the formula is open to a "plethora of criticisms," but adds that

it is a "rational and fair approach to allocation."

Using its formula, for example, the report concludes that the state Division for Youth will eventually have to make placement of 41 youths into six group homes on Staten Island. No agency has ever developed such statistics.