

State knew of conditions at boarding house

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Staten Island mental health officials were prepared to provide badly needed services to discharged psychiatric patients living in a Princes Bay boarding house, but regional mental health officials decided against it late in the fall.

Thus, the residents of the former Christmas Tree Inn have continued to live in conditions that Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly has charged are "life threatening." A top official of an Island psychiatric center concedes that the people in the Inn are on the

edge of existence."

Most of the approximately 20 persons who live in the 51 Wilbur St. boarding house are former patients of the South Beach Psychiatric Center or the North Richmond Community Mental Health center. Officials at both centers say they have been somewhat aware of the conditions at the boarding house.

Mrs. Connelly last week asked state and city agencies to probe the boarding house's workings, charging that inadequate heat and hot water, and generally filthy living conditions threaten residents' lives. An Advance investigation

found numerous violations of the city's health and building codes.

The acting director of South Beach said in an interview that the center had made plans this summer to staff the boarding house and essentially arrange for all the services the mentally disabled residents require. The program would have been similar to ones that have been established in 10 Manhattan single room occupancy (SRO) hotels.

In November, however, South Beach officials were told that instead of the SRO program regional officials had decided to set up a referral-placement unit

at St. Vincent's Medical Center's psychiatric emergency room.

Assemblywoman Connelly has already clashed with regional officials over that referral unit, but now, after revelations of the conditions in the Princes Bay boarding house, she said she will attempt to block the unit.

"I don't know whether we can," she said, but "I've asked the (Assembly) Ways and Means Committee to check and see if the money can be halted." The referral unit is expected to cost

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