

State to assign aides to monitor welfare inn

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly said yesterday the commissioner of the state Office of Mental Health promised her that the state would assign two staffers to monitor conditions at a Princes Bay boarding house she had charged threatens the lives of its residents.

After meeting yesterday with Commissioner James A. Prevost, Mrs. Connelly said she is "hopeful" that the 20 residents of the former Christmas Tree

(A problem compounded — see editorial on Page 8.)

Inn will begin to receive basic services.

Mrs. Connelly had charged that "life-threatening" conditions existed for the residents, many of whom are discharged patients from state and private psychiatric centers. An Advance investigation showed numerous violations of city building and health-code regulations at the facility.

Meanwhile, the city Health Department released documents yesterday indicating that many residents at the boarding house need medical services and that food is inadequate, if available.

Mrs. Connelly said from her Albany office that Prevost said he was asking the South Beach Psychiatric Center to determine if the boarding house at 51 Wilber St. was worth "cleaning up" and if the state should attempt to station a unit there to meet the residents' needs.

Mrs. Connelly said it was not clear yesterday if Prevost would move to halt funding for a \$100,000 liaison unit and put the money instead toward a unit in the Christmas Tree Inn. She said Pre-

vost agreed that services in the boarding house should take precedence over the liaison unit.

The money for the liaison unit comes from a \$4-million appropriation meant for patients discharged from state psychiatric centers into community facilities. "The money was intended for people like those in the Christmas Tree Inn," Mrs. Connelly said yesterday.

The acting director of South Beach,

Martin Kaufman, said yesterday that either unit "would probably improve" conditions at the boarding house. He said South Beach "would like to put a program there," but he emphasized that the liaison unit might be just as effective.

Kaufman also said South Beach "has always discouraged its patients from going" to the inn, but he added that some patients like the facility and

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State to assign 2 aides to monitor Christmas Tree Inn

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choose it over other living arrangements.

A city Health Department memo noted one nurse was told that residents live there because "This place offers us a refuge." Some of the residents lived in parks or at the St. George ferry terminal before moving there.

The landlord, Anthony Guddemi, said that he considers many people at the inn "like his family." Indeed, many residents say he is the only person who cares for them.

The Health Department, however, responding to a request for an investigation from Mrs. Connelly, said that apparently Guddemi's "care" is not enough.

Mrs. Connelly notified the Health Department on Dec. 21. A health sanitarian visited the three-story, 27-room building on Dec. 22 and found only one of its boilers operating. Work was in progress on the boiler:

The sanitarian said she saw "poor maintenance" and referred the problem to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, which has listed the building for 32 minor violations.

A city nurse, Eldred Graham, visited the inn on Dec. 26, but residents barred her from rooms. "Several residents in the hallway assured us the rooms were warm," she said in a Jan. 2 memo. She added, "We found the hallway cold."

The nurse contacted Guddemi and revisited on Dec. 28. "Cleaning activity was in progress," Ms. Graham said. "The kitchen, hallways and bathrooms were being cleaned," she said.

Ms. Graham interviewed 18 residents. One needed immediate medical attention, and two "were found to be in need of some follow-up care." Ms. Graham had to return again to get the woman admitted to Richmond Memorial Hospital.

The city Health Department told Mrs. Connelly in a letter sent Monday that

the Island office "is continuing to monitor the situation to see that appropriate medical supervision is given."

Ms. Graham cautioned that, although some residents can walk, "they seem to require (medical) care."

About food, Ms. Graham said Guddemi told her that "he provides residents with three meals a day." The city says he has no licenses to prepare food. Ms. Graham said food includes "cheese peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and sometimes soup."

"Clients do seem to accept this regime without complaints. We did observe many empty beer bottles in rooms," she added.

Ms. Graham said the kitchen showed no evidence of use and had no refrigeration.

City Health Commissioner Reinaldo A. Ferrer, in a letter to Mrs. Connelly, said: "A major problem remains in the area of food...The meals provided by the owner, Mr. Guddemi, for an additional charge, are very inadequate."

Ferrer said the city would begin to work with five agencies to improve food services and "to decrease inappropriate discharges" from hospitals to the boarding house.

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