

State expresses doubts over placement levels

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intermediate-care facilities housing more than 10 residents, the maximum number prescribed by the consent decree.

During more than two hours of testimony before a joint hearing of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Coughlin also said:

¶ The state is moving ahead with plans to build a \$500,000 biological hazard facility at the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook. Coughlin said the facility will safeguard the transfer of waste materials from biological experiments at the center. In addition, institute officials said the facility will enable them to begin experimenting with viruses believed to cause mental retardation.

¶ Defended last year's transfer of approximately \$3 million within his budget to make up for deficit in several community retardation programs. The Bureau of the Budget had said the procedure was "clandestine," but Coughlin said they were necessary to keep programs going. He did promise, however, to consult with Legislative leaders before making any large-scale transfers of funds.

¶ Responding to a question by Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, he said that the state has not yet decided what it will do with the 384-acre Willowbrook institution when the facility's population reaches 250. Coughlin said he agreed with Mrs. Connelly that planning for the future use of "this valuable property" should begin soon.

¶ Reported that the state has hired a consultant for \$35,000 to improve inventory control at state developmental centers. Last year, the Advance reported that more than 60,000 towels were missing from the Staten Island Developmental Center.

¶ Absenteeism at the Staten Island Developmental Center has been reduced, but is still nearly double the 6 percent rate at upstate institutions. Coughlin said Willowbrook union leaders are now working with the state to try to reduce absenteeism.

¶ Said he was generally pleased with the \$531-million budget given his department in the governor's executive budget, a change from last year when he complained about severe cuts made at several developmental centers, including Willowbrook.

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