

Connelly conducts hearing

Multiply disabled lack single state agency

The state of New York has inadequate facilities for its multiply disabled citizens, according to testimony given yesterday during a Manhattan hearing by the Assembly Committee on Mental Health.

Dr. Gerald Spielman of the Staten Island Center for Developmental Disabilities said multiply disabled children and adults are often "ping-ponged" from

one agency to another without adequate service.

"It's extremely frustrating because there is no facility or agency either equipped or ready to serve these people," he said.

Spielman read from a paper by Dr. Nora Smith, director of clinical services for the Staten Island Mental Health Society, about the inability of

local officials to find a suitable facility for an adolescent, who was deemed retarded and afflicted with a serious behavior problem.

"The local state hospital said it could not accept him because he was too retarded; the local developmental center did not accept him for respite care because he was too behaviorally disturbed," Dr. Smith said.

Spielman said local mental health officials are trying to convince the state Office of Mental Health to fund a local 10-bed facility for multiply disabled patients.

Others testifying at the hearing said the reorganization of the state Office of Mental Hygiene into four autonomous units has hurt those with multiple handicaps, who need services from two or more of the state units.

"A human being does not fall solely into territory arbitrarily assigned by administrators or rigidly delineated categories," said June J. Christmas, commissioner of the city office of Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services. "Unfortunately, the client cannot reorganize his illness to conform to territorial boundaries."

The hearings, which were conducted by Staten Island Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, chairwoman of the Mental Health Committee, also included charges that the state mental health bureaucracy is poorly administered.

Hannah A. Chen of the Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Agencies said the state often needlessly delays dispensing money approved for local mental health programs.

Last year, she said, nearly \$5 million was lost in community support service grants because the state Office of Mental Health failed to distribute the money in time.

Mrs. Connelly, a North Shore Democrat, said the hearings highlighted all that needs to be done for the multiple handicapped.

"Concerted efforts are necessary before we can be assured that clients will stop being ping-ponged back and from program to program, with no one taking responsibility and no services provided," she said.