

Willowbrook, South Beach safety officers discuss joining strike

By A. STANLEY ALLISON

Safety officers at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, and the South Beach Psychiatric Center, Ocean Breeze, who are members of the same union as striking correction officers, have discussed the possibility of going on strike, the Advance has learned.

According to a spokesman for Council 82 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, an average of 90 percent of the safety of-

ficers at about nine psychiatric centers and institutions for the criminally insane throughout the state are already on strike.

Ten of the twelve safety officers at the Elmira Psychiatric Center walked off their jobs yesterday, a spokesman for the state Office of Mental Health said. The center has a patient population of 104.

Safety officers are also on strike at the Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center and Central New York Psychiatric Center, as well as the Letchworth Village Psy-

chiatric Center.

The Council 82 spokesman said that safety officers are on strike at five Long Island mental institutions, including the Kings Park, Central Islip and Pilgrim centers.

The mental health spokesman minimized the effect of the walkouts. "It's nothing that can't be controlled," the spokesman, Robert Spoor, said.

He added that at a number of institutions, the unions are taking votes daily on whether or not to strike.

At the Staten Island Developmental

Center, James Shea, deputy director, said that although he is not aware of any discussions the safety officers may have had about striking, "I have reason to believe that they're not considering it."

At least one safety officer at the Willowbrook facility, said that the officers have discussed striking and Sgt. Robert Klaskin did not deny such discussions. He said, we "are not taking any action at this point."

Klaskin pointed out that most safety officers at the Island Center are professional employees, who could be fired immediately if they went on strike.

"They're the ones that can strike the least," Klaskin said.

The other safety officers at the center, Klaskin said, are prevented from striking under provisions of the state's Taylor Law.

At the South Beach Psychiatric Center, a safety officer who refused to identify himself said that while no vote had been taken to authorize a strike, "We all want a reliable wage to support our families and some obviously think they're not getting it."

"That's what this whole strike is all about wages."

The officer added that the union leadership at the center apparently has discussed the possibility of a walkout.

"I'm not calling the shots," he said, "and while there's been talk, nobody's jumping off to anything yet."

Meanwhile, as the correction officers strike entered its eighth day, there have been talks through a mediator in Albany between state negotiators and union leaders. "but no progress" was reported, according to the Council 82 spokesman.

He added that there would probably be more talks later today after the union and state representatives leave state Supreme Court where the state is attempting to have the union leaders penalized and held in contempt for violating a restraining order signed before the walkout began a week ago.