

Violence, threats spur institutional security bill

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly is again planning to introduce legislation to upgrade the quality of security forces at state psychiatric hospitals and developmental centers.

Citing incidents of violence, threatening the safety of security officers, patients and staff at the institutions, Mrs. Connelly said her legislation would require improved training for safety officers as well as stiffer qualifications and higher pay.

Mrs. Connelly cited a recent incident

at the Staten Island Developmental Center where a guard was attacked by four unidentified persons who were roaming the grounds. Badly hurt, she recalled, the officer required hospital treatment.

"This center," she said, "continues to be plagued by violent incidents, threats to supervisors, harassment of various staffers and a high level of threats."

In a letter to the state's Office for Mental Health and Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, she wrote, "We must act to stop this situation." While she noted that her legislation would not end all safety problems at the centers, "it would definitely have a deterrent effect."

Over the past five years, Mrs. Connelly, who chairs the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Retardation, has unsuccessfully introduced similar legislation on several occasions.