

State says it can empty developmental center quickly

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conditions at the state institution for the retarded.

Emptying the developmental center of nearly all residents by May 1981 is a provision of the decree that the state has thus far been unable to realize on schedule.

Review panel members have accused Introne of drastically accelerating the placement goals to be free of their influence. If the deadline for phasing out the developmental center were met, the panel would become defunct.

From then on, the state could conceivably opt to shelve its avowed policy of phasing handicapped persons out of un-

wieldy institutions into the more intimate facilities which, as a party to the Willowbrook Consent Decree, it has deemed healthier.

Introne insisted that his office did not consider the panel in when formulating the state placement plans. The "compelling" reason for quickening placement, he said, is to provide "the least-restrictive possible environment" for developmental center patients.

Not all 1,500 residents, however, will be moved directly from the developmental center into community facilities. Many, if not most, of them will make at least a waystop at other institutions, Introne indicated.

The developmental center's population has already declined from a high of more than 6,000 in the 1960s to 1,719 last November. Since 1975, 867 residents have been placed in group homes or similar facilities, according to state statistics. The rest, numbering in the thousands, were transferred to other institutions.

Those thousands, said Cora Hoffman, a spokeswoman for Introne are generally less disabled than the 1,719 persons still residing at the developmental center. Those less disabled persons will receive priority, she said, in future placements to group homes. Residents due to be evacuated from the developmental center under the stepped-up plan will presumably go to wait their turn in institutions.