

Mental health panel wants better services

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — Providers of care for the mentally retarded called on state lawmakers yesterday to provide their clients with the same level of services given residents at state institutions.

The providers, members of the Inter-agency Council of Mental Retardation Agencies in New York City, charged that a "discriminatory situation exists today" as the result of a 1975 court order that mandated improved care for former and current residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center.

"One class of handicapped persons is

receiving special consideration while another is being denied equal treatment," the council said in a prepared statement.

Sonia Braniff, chairwoman of the Staten Island Regional Council for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and one of nine Staten Islanders in Albany yesterday to lobby for increased funding for community-based programs, said, "We're just looking for some equality in funding." She noted that parents of children who have not been institutionalized are not entitled to 100 percent funding for programs fully funded for former and current residents of the Willowbrook institution.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, chairwoman of the Assembly Mental Health Committee, told the Island representatives that passage was likely this year of her proposal advocating a demonstration project for in-home care of the retarded and developmentally disabled. She said that about 300 families would qualify for assistance under her proposal, which has a pricetag of \$1 million.

Also lobbying for increased aid for the retarded yesterday were Howard J. Safar, administrator of the Staten Island Mental Health Society; Mary Jane Davis, of the Staten Island Center for Developmental Disabilities; Joan Hodum and Harry Friedland of Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children; Beatrice Victor of Volunteers of America; and Genevieve Bexoit and Diane Buglioli of A Very Special Place.