

Island leads city in proportion of group homes

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ALBANY — A state report says that, on a per capita basis, Staten Island has a higher percentage of group homes than other boroughs.

But the report, requested by Island lawmakers concerned that the Island is becoming oversaturated with such facilities, says the borough still has room to accommodate new group homes that will be needed as the state moves to phase out the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, by April 1981.

The report, prepared by the New York State Health Planning Commission, recommends, however, that all social service agencies, including the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, limit placements to boroughs or counties where the residents were born or where their families reside. The state has already agreed to place residents from the Willowbrook developmental center in their home communities.

The 12-page report says foster and troubled children from outside the borough have traditionally been placed in group homes and other community facilities on the Island, particularly on the North Shore. The commission suggests that some of these facilities be "closed by attrition." As residents leave these facilities, the report said, the beds should not be filled, unless a bed is with a youth from the Island.

Also recommended by the commission is a central "clearing house" for community facilities to assure that no area is oversaturated with group homes. Community-based facilities should not be located within a quarter-mile of a similar facility, the report said.

The report said the Island has twice the percentage of group homes per capita than other boroughs. And it says Community Board 1 has the highest ratio of such facilities on the Island.

More than 80 percent of the Island beds are sponsored by the Department of Social Services for foster care and for juvenile delinquents.

"While it is apparent that Staten Island, in fact, does have a higher ratio of

community facilities than other counties of New York City," the report said, "this largely results from the disproportionate placement of non-residents in Staten Island facilities of all types."

The study estimated that the borough will need an additional 356 beds in group homes and other community residences in the next three to five years.

The report said, however, that if future placements in the borough are limited to residents who were either born or who have relatives on the Island, the ratio of group homes will conform to the rest of the city and will not disrupt local communities.

Cora Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said the agency has agreed to place residents slated to be transferred from the Staten Island Developmental Center into facilities in their "home communities."

"We will be happy to concur with the recommendations, including the clearing house, if it could reach its decision in a timely fashion," Ms. Hoffman said.

The agency has already contracted with a non-profit Westchester-based agency that tracks all community facilities to avoid "oversaturation" of any community, she said.

But an aide to Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly of West Brighton said the agency had proposed inappropriate sites for community residences. Recently, he said, the state proposed to place four retarded residents in an apartment, located only one block from an adult home that houses psychiatric patients.

Only after Mrs. Connelly intervened, did the state drop the "ridiculous" proposal, the aide said.

State Sen. John J. Marchi of Ward Hill said he has not yet seen the report but concurs with its findings that placement should be made based on a resident's home community.

He said the recommendation re-enforces his belief that a Brooklyn-based religious group, Beth Rifka, should be denied permission to open the Danube

Nursing Home in Concord.

"It would be OK if we had the hospital beds," Marchi said. "But we are the only county in the state where our hospitals are operating close to capacity."

Officials from the state Department of Social Services and private agencies that operate facilities for youth on the Island were unavailable yesterday to comment on the report.

But, most observers agree, it is doubtful that private agencies will be willing to phase out their residential facilities

in the borough by limiting future placements to Island residents.

The state Health Planning Commission, headed by Gov. Carey's health adviser Dr. Kevin Cahill, is mandated by federal law to coordinate the delivery of health and social services in the state.

A spokesman said the report was prepared by commission staff and officials from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the state Office of Health Systems Management, the Department of Social Services and staff from both Marchi's and Mrs. Connelly's office.