

Our opinion

Island needs group home relief

Staten Island has earned a deserved reputation as a community where, by and large, people are willing to help those less fortunate than themselves. That probably explains why, with a few exceptions, Islanders generally have been willing to accept the establishment of group homes in neighborhood after neighborhood.

But now a report, prepared by the state Health Planning Commission at the request of Island legislators, has suggested that the understanding of Islanders may have been systematically taken advantage of by some of the agencies operating group homes.

The Island, the report found, has twice as many group homes as any other borough, as measured on a per capita basis. And a disproportionate number of that disproportionate share of homes, the report added, are found in the North and East Shore communities within the boundaries of Community Board 1.

Compounding the rather startling disclosure of the concentration of group homes of all sorts on the Island is the planning commission's finding that many of those residing in group homes here are from other boroughs.

Incredibly the report — after conceding the overabundance of group homes and the fact that many of the group home beds are occupied by non-Islanders — concludes that the Island should be able to accommodate some additional homes to house persons to be discharged from the Staten Island Developmental Center.

We don't know now the state would describe the convoluted logic that enables it to conclude that a community with an obvious oversupply of group home beds

ought to accept some more.

But we do know what we call the practice — dumping. The state seems to be intent upon placing the greatest number of group homes possible in a community that has offered relatively little resistance to group home siting thus far.

It should be clear that our objection is not to group homes or those who live in them, whether the individuals be orphans, juvenile delinquents or persons with developmental disabilities. We do object, rather, to the state's attitude that the Island should be expected to support a proportionally greater share of group homes in terms of population than any other borough.

Unless the responsible agencies are willing to act independently, the Legislature should order several actions to correct the borough-to-borough group home imbalance.

First, there ought to be an absolute cap on group homes on the Island, so no more of the facilities could be opened here. That would grant the Island needed relief and guarantee that additional group homes will be sited in boroughs now carrying less than their fair share.

In addition, procedures should be established so that non-Islanders residing in Island group homes might be transferred to homes in their own home community or county on an expedited basis. Vacancies created by that process could then be filled by Islanders in need of group home care, without establishing additional group home facilities.