

Official fears for plan for Willowbrook

By BRUCE ALPERT
Advance Staff Writer

ALBANY — State Mental Retardation Commissioner James E. Introne said yesterday that he fears state lawmakers, led by Sen. John J. Marchi of Ward Hill, may be trying to cripple his plan to virtually close the Staten Island Developmental Center by 1981.

But aides to Marchi said Introne's fears are unjustified and that the senator and other lawmakers are simply not happy with the commissioner's plan to pay for new community residential facilities to house the retarded through the issuance of state bonds.

The aides said the agency will be spared the sharp cuts in community placement funds that have been rumored, although Marchi may insist that Staten Island be protected from oversaturation of community facilities.

Introne said he suspects, however, that lawmakers are using arguments against his funding proposal for new residential facilities as an excuse to gut the program.

"He (Marchi) wants a moratorium on group homes on Staten Island and this may be his way of enforcing it," Introne said. Marchi called for a moratorium on new group homes last summer, saying he feared the borough was becoming oversaturated with such facilities.

Under Introne's plan, the population at Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook would be reduced from 1,750 to 250 by April 1981. The plan would require the placement of about 100 center residents into community facilities to be set up on the Island.

Eugene K. Tyksinski, assistant secretary to the Fi-

nance Committee, said Marchi remains committed to meeting the terms of the Willowbrook Consent Decree, a 1975 agreement calling for the virtual closing of the center by 1981.

"We've got to approve a budget that leaves the effort to speed up placements in place," Tyksinski said. "The court order is there and it has to be adhered to."

Although Marchi will support increased funding for community placement programs, Tyksinski and James Biggane, secretary to the Finance Committee, said Marchi still plans to insist on assurances that the borough will not be oversaturated with group homes. A state study, conducted at Marchi's request, indicated that the Island has a higher concentration of group homes than any other borough.

"Certainly, we will be looking for some protection for Staten Island before we sign off on any plan," Biggane said.

Biggane said that lawmakers will also be looking for a new funding mechanism to pay for the acquisition and construction of group homes across the state. Introne proposes floating state bonds to pay for the facilities.

"Now is certainly not the time to float new bonds with interest rates being what they are today," Biggane said.

At stake is \$11-million proposed for the deficiency budget and \$33-million in the main budget to cover the cost of the new facilities.

Introne said if the state does not go along with his request to bond out the cost of the new facilities and, as he fears, does not arrange alternate financing, his plan to speed placement of Staten Island Developmental Center patients in the community would be doomed.

"It will obviously upset my plan and could put us in a state of non-compliance with a court decree," Introne said. In addition, he said that a delay in closing buildings at the Staten Island Developmental Center may jeopardize Medicaid funding for the retarded remaining at the center.

The state received a waiver from Medicaid regulations that would have required costly renovations at the center, provided the buildings not in compliance were closed by 1981, he said.

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