

Official blasts care of disabled, retarded

At a conference held yesterday in Ellenville, N.Y., Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly warned that countless seriously troubled people are "slipping through the cracks" of an overly budget-conscious state mental health care system.

Mrs. Connelly focused on the needs of individuals who are both emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded in her speech to participants in a regional conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

"The problems facing the multiply disabled are often the most severe; they're also too often ignored," the West Brighton Democrat told her audience.

"People in the executive chamber are setting New York State's mental hygiene priorities from a budget perspective," she added. As a result, the assemblywoman said, specialized programs are being wiped out and the multiply disabled population in particular is being adversely affected.

Mrs. Connelly, who chairs the Assembly Mental Health Committee, said her staff has compiled nearly two dozen cases on Staten Island of multiply dis-

abled persons for whom appropriate treatment has not been available.

The Island's two psychiatric centers, she said, often "squabble" over which one should assume responsibility for cases where emotional problems are complicated by mental retardation. The two facilities, South Beach Psychiatric Center and North Richmond Community Mental Health Center, have overlapping geographic areas of jurisdiction.

Mrs. Connelly suggested that many multiply disabled individuals could be properly cared for in the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, if that institution had not closed its admissions in 1972.

Spurned by the mental health system where they belong, the multiply disabled tend to wind up in prisons or as a confusing burden on their families, Mrs. Connelly said.

"Nobody," she told the conference at the Fallsview Hotel, "seems to want these poor people."

"I fear that what is happening in my district on Staten Island is merely a microcosm of what exists throughout the rest of the state and throughout the country," Mrs. Connelly said.

— ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS