

# Group homes: Wait 'til next year

By BRUCE ALPERT

ALBANY — State lawmakers apparently will wait until next year to deal with the volatile issue of group homes.

The Assembly Mental Health Committee, chaired by Elizabeth A. Connelly of West Brighton, voted to hold 21 of 25 group home bills on its calendar last week. The action means the measures are dead for the current legislative session.

"We want to get more information before we make major changes in the site selection process," Mrs. Connelly said after the meeting. "We're going to schedule public hearings across the state this summer."

Most of the bills were aimed at giving communities more control over the locations of these homes. And some lawmakers were angry that the committee had delayed action, noting the exodus of residents from the Staten Island Developmental Center planned for the next 12 months.

Assemblyman John Fossil, R-Lewisboro, said that his home county of Westchester is slated to be the site of 30 new group homes. Now, he said, is the time to develop procedures that will ensure group home operators

the sites they need, while protecting communities from oversaturation of such facilities.

But Mrs. Connelly made it clear some of the proposals effectively would prevent the opening of any group home sites. And she said state plans to virtually empty the Staten Island Developmental Center by April 1981 are unrealistic.

"I don't think there is anyone who thinks the state will be able to move residents out that quickly," Mrs. Connelly said. "We have time to develop the best possible procedures."

She added that current siting procedures giving communities at least 40 days to ob-

ject to a group home won overwhelming approval in a statewide poll. The three bills that were approved by the committee would:

- Limit the population of group homes to eight residents, a change from the current law that allows 14.
- Require homes to comply with state building and fire codes.
- Allow communities to get a commitment from group/home operators that if the home is closed the property will be sold and used for non-government purposes.

## The Legislature last week

The Assembly and Senate voted to provide \$22.3 million in additional funds for the State University of New York. Sen. John J. Marchi, Assembly representatives Paul Viggiano, Mrs. Connelly and Molinari were all present for the unanimous votes. Gov. Carey said he will sign the bill into law, even though he vetoed the appropriation when it was included in the state budget approved by lawmakers.

The Assembly approved a measure sponsored by Mrs. Connelly that will allow blind people to sit on juries when a judge believes that sight is not necessary to evaluate the merits of a case. Mrs. Connelly and Viggiano voted for the measure, while Molinari opposed it.

Mrs. Connelly said blind people are just as capable of considering certain legal cases as sighted people and should not be barred from sitting on juries. Molinari, however, said the ability to see a witness and his expressions is often very important in determining his credibility.

## Capitol punishment

ject to a group home won overwhelming approval in a statewide poll.

The three bills that were approved by the committee would:

- Limit the population of group homes to eight residents, a change from the current law that allows 14.
- Require homes to comply with state building and fire codes.
- Allow communities to get a commitment from group/home operators that if the home is closed the property will be sold and used for non-government purposes.