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Handicapped go to camp despite cuts

From our Albany Bureau

ALBANY -- More than 470 developmentally disabled Staten Island youngsters will be going to summer camp, after all.

State Mental Retardation Commissioner James E. Introne announced yesterday that despite state budget uncertainties he has ordered camp programs for 1,200 developmentally disabled children to open as scheduled this summer.

On Staten Island, the state provided $99,220 last year to privately run summer camps for the retarded. The camps were attended by 262 residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, and 212 persons living elsewhere in the borough. Eight more Island residents attended the state program in the Catskills.

Last month, Introne said the failure of the state Legislature to approve a deficiency budget request for the agency forced him to order the program discontinued. But yesterday the commissioner said he decided to use existing funds to continue the program — for at least this summer. He conceded that the decision may force the agency to cutback year-round programs for the retarded if the Legislature does not provide his agency with additional funds.

"Despite that fact, we feel the summer programs are so important to our clients and their families that we will go ahead with the hope that the needed support will be forthcoming in the supplemental budget," Introne said.

Earlier, the Legislature's failure to pass a deficiency budget threatened to cut off fuel supplies at the Staten Island Developmental Center and other state facilities across the state. The deficiency budget, generally approved at the end of the fiscal year, is supposed to provide funds to cover unanticipated expenses.

State Comptroller Edward Regan said he would not pay bills left over from the 1979-80 fiscal year, which ended March 31. Among them was a $1.3-million fuel bill from the Willowbrook institution.

As a result, suppliers of fuel at the developmental center and other state institutions last month threatened to cut off deliveries. But since that threat, Regan has backed off and has agreed to pay fuel bills. He started the money flow after receiving commitments from legislative leaders that additional allocations would be approved by both the Assembly and Senate.

— BRUCE ALPERT