

# State to reconsider plan to shut center for 6,000 retarded

Special to the Advance

VALHALLA, N.Y. — About 70 parents and members of agencies that serve the mentally retarded met with legislators and a top state official yesterday to try and head off the proposed closing of a Westchester center for the retarded.

As a result of the session, Mental Retardation Commissioner James E. Introne promised to study the plan to close the Mental Retardation Institute (MRT) at New York Medical College. The institute, which serves 6,000 retarded citizens, including an estimated 12 former Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, residents, is scheduled to close its inpatient and outpatient programs Sept. 1.

The initial proposal to close the center came amid protests by employees and parents. The closing is in apparent defiance of federal regulations.

Introne said yesterday he was unaware of the intensity of opposition

to the closing of the institution and scheduled another meeting on the issue for Tuesday.

The institute, which is run by the New York Medical College, is scheduled to be transferred to the Flower Hospital in Manhattan. The center is being closed to eliminate a financial drain on the school and provide more "efficient" services to the retarded, Hank McManus, spokesman for the college, has said.

Opponents of the move maintain the closing, which was approved by Introne, will result in the loss of important services to retarded residents of Westchester, Putnam, and Rockland Counties. Some of the residents are living in group homes in the suburban counties after years of institutional care at the Willowbrook center.

The Archdiocese of New York, which owns Flower Hospital and oversees operations of the college, says the institute has not been profitable. Officials of New York Medical College, which is subsidizing the institute, report that the center is \$1.6 million in debt, mostly in mortgage payments. The archdiocese is hoping to cut costs by merging facilities.

The plan calls for some services to be transferred to Flower Hospital, while others would be provided by private agencies in Westchester.

Betty Greene, a member of the institute's clinical communicology department, has charged that the closing, "without formulation of any contingency plans, is the mark of a thorough lack of humanity."

Meanwhile, parents of MRT patients and agencies that run group homes for individuals released from the institution, are irate because the college is transferring the institute so the building can be used for administrative purposes.

Federal officials are looking at the requirements of a \$3-million federal grant that subsidized construction of the MRI building.

The grant states that the building, which opened in 1972, is required to provide mental health services for at least 20 years. That would seem to rule out the use of the building for administrative purposes and classrooms as planned by the New York Medical College.