
Hiring freeze melts, state OKs staff hike at mental health centers

By MARK LIEBERMAN

A thaw in the state's hiring freeze to allow the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to fill 1,700 slots was announced by the Carey administration yesterday. The new hiring will reduce understaffing at state psychiatric and developmental centers.

The announcement followed a series in the Daily News detailing understaffing at the centers—specifically the Manhattan Psychiatric Center and the Staten Island Developmental Center—and a request by William McGowan, president of the Civil Service Employees Association.

A spokesman for Gov. Carey said the decision to allow the departments to begin hiring again had been made "a few weeks ago" after State Budget Director Howard Miller determined that the agencies had achieved their required savings. Miller, according to

union officials, advised Meyer Frucher, director of the governor's Office of Employee Relations, last week that the two agencies could begin hiring. The new jobs carry a combined payroll of about \$11 million annually.

McGowan said that two years ago Robert Morgado, Carey's secretary, established a ratio of 1.78 employes for every client in mental retardation facilities and one staff member for every patient in mental health facilities by the end of the state's 1982 fiscal year. The state's hiring freeze, McGowan said, violated that policy agreement and led to ratios of more than 40 patients or clients for each staff member in some facilities.

Union officials said that most of the jobs to be filled will be mental hygiene therapy aides, but some clerical and food service jobs will be included as well.

New staff members, union officials said, may begin working within three weeks. ■