

Willowbrook staff is spared

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Gov. Carey has authorized the state's 20 institutions for the mentally retarded to keep on their payrolls some 1,500 employees who had been expected to find work in small community-based facilities by April 1981.

The community facilities, intended to replace institutional care for the retarded, have not materialized as quickly as projected at the beginning of this year by the state Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD).

OMRDD officials yesterday blamed the delay on the state Legislature's refusal to appropriate \$33 million requested by the agency to secure new community facilities.

Albany lawmakers, however, including West Brighton Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, who chairs the Assembly mental health committee, have contended that OMRDD has a history of inappropriate site selection and extravagant capital outlays for community facilities. In rejecting the appropriation last spring, the legislators said they were awaiting more specific data from mental retardation officials on proposed facilities.

The Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, was to be the most profoundly affected of all the state institutions by community placement plans, scheduled to lose 50 percent of its work force and all but 250 of its approximately 1,100 mentally retarded residents. Negligible progress has been made toward that goal since it was announced by Gov. Carey in January.

William F. Murray, assistant director of OMRDD budget services, said yesterday that his office also had drastically overestimated the number of employees who would drop off institutional payrolls through natural attrition during the fiscal year that ends March 31.

Adhering to a promise of no layoffs, combined with some new hiring in upstate institutions, OMRDD is faced with the task of providing slots for 2,855 unanticipated employees in its institutions, Murray said.

Of that total, 1,500 workers — those originally slated for transfer to community programs — have been accounted for in the state's current budget, he said. Murray said his agency will ask the Legislature to allocate money in the state's supplemental budget to cover the salaries of the remaining 1,355 workers.

The Legislature is expected to vote on the supplemental budget within the next month. Murray said the size of the allocation needed by his agency has not yet been computed.

Last winter, OMRDD officials projected that through attrition and transfers into the community the employee census at Willowbrook would stand at 1,484 by the close of the current fiscal year. Primarily because of the community placement plan's failure, Murray said, the census projection has now been revised to allow 2,529 employees at the institution — a difference of 1,045 workers.

A federal court order requiring the Willowbrook institution to empty all but 250 of its mentally retarded residents into the community by next April provided the impetus and model for New York state's community placement policy in general.

Mental retardation officials concede, however, that they will not be able to meet the court deadline and that they plan to seek an extension. The institution currently houses about 1,060 residents according to administrators.