

Lagging group home placements may cost state millions in aid \$\$

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ALBANY — A legislative commission warned yesterday that the state faces a loss of millions of dollars in federal aid for retardation programs, if, as expected, it fails to meet community placement goals for the state's 20 developmental centers.

The report, prepared by the Legislative Commission on Expenditure Review, said the state appears unlikely to meet an agreement to reduce the developmental center population to 10,285 in July 1982.

The state now houses 14,525 residents in its institutions for the retarded, including the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, and receives \$340-million a

year in Medicaid support from the federal government.

The 88-page report said the state is only moving an average of 93 patients a month from developmental centers, far short of the 155 residents that must be transferred under an agreement signed in 1976 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by state mental retardation officials.

"Failure to meet the federal guidelines will mean that New York may lose a portion of the Medicaid funding it currently receives," said Assemblyman Arthur J. Kremer, D-Nassau, the commission chairman. "To further complicate the problem, clients who were easiest to place were put in the community first."

State Mental Retardation Commissioner James E. Introne said he is hopeful the federal government will give the state more time to meet its placement goals, thereby continuing current aid levels through 1982.

Introne has already conceded that the state will not meet the requirements of a 1975 federal court decree calling for all but 250 Staten Island Developmental Center residents to be placed in community residences by April. The state now projects that the Willowbrook institution, which housed more than 6,000 residents in the 1960s, will still care for at least 550 retarded citizens in April.

"Last year, we said if we make a massive effort we can make the 250 target for Willowbrook," Introne said. "Now it's really too late."

The legislative report warns that the state faces the possibility of court fines and contempt of court citations if the April deadline set by the decree, called the Willowbrook Consent Judgment is not met. But state mental retardation officials say they are now close to agreement with court officials on a new deadline for the virtual emptying of the Island developmental center.

Introne said the Legislature must share at least part of the blame for the delay in placing developmental center residents into community residences, where mental retardation experts believe they are most likely to achieve their maximum potential.

Lawmakers, he said, on at least two separate occasions refused to provide funds for community residences that had already completed the site-selection process established by state law.

"At this point even if we had all of the money in the world, we could not possibly make the number of placements required," Introne said.

The legislative report also charged that although the state is complying with federal requirements for long-term planning of retardation services, state and local officials regularly ignore the plans in organizing services.

"Under the current system, a great deal of time is spent at the local and state levels developing plans," Kremer said. "It is not clear, however, that they are used in the daily operation of the county programs."