

Our opinion

Follow-through needed on home siting

The state's effort to make a "fresh start" in the manner in which group homes for the mentally retarded are selected is both necessary and commendable.

Until now, the transfer of retarded persons from state-run institutions to small, community-based homes has been conducted in a manner that bred little but suspicion and mistrust on the part of those living in neighborhoods where the group homes were to be opened. The entire placement program — intended to help the retarded realize their full potential — has suffered as a result.

Over the years state officials have been fond of blaming problems with the placement program on citizens who, for one reason or another, fought efforts to establish group homes in their neighborhoods.

There's no question that such popular opposition existed, nor should there be any doubt about the fact that some of that opposition was based on sheer ignorance.

But it's also true that a great many of the problems encountered in establishing group homes stemmed from the policies and practices of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. There have been documented cases in which the agency deliberately circumvented regulations intended to keep citizens apprised of plans to establish group homes in their neighborhoods.

Now the agency, headed by Commissioner James Introne, has developed new guidelines under which communities not only would be told more about plans to set up group homes but actually would be given a voice in deciding where the homes ought to be located.

It will be up to Mr. Introne and his subordinates to make certain the new guidelines achieve their intended effect. It simply won't do to blame continued shortcomings on public resistance, when much of that resistance is the responsibility of the state itself.