

UCP director resigns under pressure

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Over the strong objections of parents, the director of Staten Island's largest privately run center for the retarded is being forced to resign under pressure, according to parents and agency officials.

Theresa Rafferty, director for two years of United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of New York State's 500-bed Karl Warner Center, worked her last day there on Monday, sources said. The center is located on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

"We don't expect to see her back here," a source at the Warner center said yesterday. "Apparently, she's just too independent for UCP's executive director."

UCP staff members, who requested anonymity, said that Ms. Rafferty had been in conflict with UCP Executive Director Robert Schonhorn for some time. They said she clashed with Schonhorn over a number of issues, including what she considered inappropriate programs offered Warner clients at UCP's day center, located in a converted Mariners Harbor tennis facility.

Both Ms. Rafferty and Schonhorn declined comment yesterday. "That's a topic between Ms. Rafferty and this agency," Schonhorn said when asked about her departure.

But parents told the Advance that Ms. Rafferty had told them she was

being forced to resign by Schonhorn and was concerned about the future of programs she helped implement.

In a telegram to state and UCP officials, the Willowbrook Benevolent Society, representing parents of residents at both UCP and state-run programs in the Staten Island Developmental Center, requested an immediate meeting on her departure. The Warner Center is financed almost entirely by state and federal funds.

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ferty's programs and all she has accomplished during her tenure," the society said.

The center opened in 1977 despite the vocal protests of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), the union representing state employees at the developmental center. The CSEA charged that UCP was being given a lucrative contract that would ultimately re-

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sult in a loss of jobs for center employees.

But Anthony Pinto, president of the Benevolent Society, said that Ms. Rafferty, unlike Schonhorn who proceeded her as director of the Warner Center, has been able to mold the combined state and UCP workforce at the Warner Center "together," uniting "them in a common goal."

"She has been fair with the union, and she has refused to accept inappropriate behavior like constant lateness and absenteeism," Pinto said.

In her last act as director, Ms. Rafferty Monday closed down Build-

ing 15, one of seven buildings that comprise the Warner Center. The building had been a focal point of controversy between UCP and the employee's union because it was run by a "shared staff" of state and UCP workers.

The building's 43 residents, all of whom were over 21, have been transferred to the remaining six UCP buildings, officials said. The 50 state employees who worked at the building have been reassigned to state-run buildings at the Island Developmental Center, they said.

"It was incredible. She completed the transfer, and then she left," a UCP official said. "A lot of us are very unhappy about it."