

# Transfers to avoid Willowbrook layoffs?

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — State Mental Retardation Commissioner James L. Introne said yesterday the "cooperation" of unions representing Staten Island Developmental Center workers would be needed to avert hundreds of layoffs at the Willowbrook institution.

Gov. Carey's proposed \$38.5-million budget for the Island center, would force the reassignment or dismissal of more than 700 workers, nearly 200 more than projected by Carey's fiscal advisers, Introne said. The center now employs about 2,700 workers.

"Unless we get the cooperation of the unions, layoffs will be necessary," he said in an interview following his appearance yesterday before Senate and Assembly fiscal committees.

Those most vulnerable to dismissal, he said, are the center's professional staff, especially teachers, nurses, and social workers. Attrition in those positions is not as high as for direct care staff, he said.

The center, formerly known as the Willowbrook State School, is slated to drop its residential census as the state moves to virtually empty the institution to comply with a 1975 court decree.

"Obviously, there will be a corresponding drop in staff," Introne said.

A representative of the Public Employees Federation (PEF), which represents professional workers at Willowbrook, yesterday pledged to work with Introne to set up a plan for alternative employment.

But Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), which represents direct care workers, said his union would not cooperate with any transfer plan for its members.

"I don't think anyone wants to transfer," said John Jackson, first vice president of the center's CSEA chapter. "We're still trying to keep the place open."

Introne said the unions "should not underestimate, how far we'd go to avoid layoffs. The state, he said, would be willing to set up bus service to transport employees from the Willowbrook center to jobs at other developmental centers, and even pay workers who have to transfer a special supplement to their regular state salary.

But Jackson says at least for the time being, the CSEA is not interested in discussing any transfer proposal.

He wants the state to keep the center's staff working at the Willowbrook institution, perhaps by establishing small residential facilities at buildings that once cared for hundreds of retarded residents.

Joseph Salerno, a PEF official, said he will request a meeting with Introne to work out an "orderly" plan to find new jobs for the center's PEF members, even though he says most of them would prefer to stay where they are.

"I don't think people really want to move," Salerno said. "They work there and live there because they like it."

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