

Not all transfers from center going into private facilities

By BRUCE ALPERT

The state is accelerating the transfer of residents from the Staten Island Developmental Center, but not all residents are going into community residences.

State mental Retardation Commissioner James L. Introne said that some residents are being transferred to other developmental centers in the metropolitan area as the state moves to comply with a 1975 consent decree that mandates the virtual emptying of the Willowbrook institution.

The center, which housed more than 5,000 residents in 1972, is scheduled to lose all but 450 residents in the next 13 months.

"That might be a little optimistic," Introne said in an interview. "But we do expect to make good progress in complying with the decree."

Introne said the state can move 100 Staten Island Developmental Center residents into other development centers under a provision in the 1975 court decree. The provision allows residents of the Willowbrook center to be transferred to other institutions if they take the place of residents moved into group homes and other community facilities.

"We hope that it will serve as a transition, preparing the residents to be moved into community residents," Introne said. All residents being transferred, whether it is to a group home or developmental center, will be moved to facilities near their families, he said.

Employees at the Island developmental center, however, contend that there is no real advantage to moving residents to another developmental center. Many say they are bitter about the transfers, especially when there is a threat of hundreds of layoffs at the Island center because of its declining residential census.

Also critical are inn members of the Willowbrook Review Panel, a court monitor of care for former and current residents of the Island center.

"There should not be transfers from one institution to another,"

said Muarry B. Schneps, a panel member. "They should be moved directly into the community.

"It doesn't do the people being transferred any good," Schneps continued. "It's just a waste of time and might be detrimental in actually delaying the time it takes for them to move into the community."

Schneps, like most mental retardation experts, contends retarded residents can better reach their full potential in small community-like settings.

Introne, in a lengthy interview, said despite his disagreements with panel members, he will press hard to restore \$350,000 in state funding for the review panel. The funds were eliminated last year by the Legislature. "But I'm not necessarily optimistic," the commissioner said.

The review panel has continued to function despite the cutback, although it no longer conducts audits of services provided members of the so-called Willowbrook class — residents of the institution in 1972 when several plaintiffs moved in courts to improve their plight.

On another issue, Introne said the state has decided to stop all transfers of Flower and Fifth Ave. Hospital, Manhattan, residents into community residences. The patients, all former residents of the Island facility, were scheduled to be transferred to three- and six-bed apartments under an agreement signed last year between the review panel and the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

The state now has decided it was a mistake to move residents into three-bed apartments. They are too expensive and not necessarily best for the residents, Introne said.

He added that he would like to move the 27 residents into eight- and 10-bed facilities, but is leery of opposition from the review panel. As a result he said, the residents remain in Flower and Fifth Ave. Hospital, a facility operated by the Archdiocese of New York at a cost of more than \$120,000 a year per patient.