

# Clinic for mentally retarded gets another budget reprieve

By BRUCE ALPERT

A clinic serving more than 100 mentally retarded clients has won another temporary reprieve from the budget ax, with state officials predicting the reprieve will soon become permanent.

The Community Treatment Clinic, operated by the North Richmond Community Mental Health Center in rented space at the Institute for Basic Research, Willowbrook, originally was slated to close at the end of June.

But funding was extended through Sunday and now state officials say they have extended funding again, this time through September 30.

"We're hoping the extra time will enable us to keep the program running with an appropriate level and source of funding," said Mark Usdane, assistant commissioner for the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

The clinic, staffed with a physician, psychiatrist, social worker and mental health tech-

nicians, provides therapy and treatment to mentally retarded persons with mental disorders.

In addition, the clinic staff provides diagnostic and consultation services for parents of the mentally retarded, counselors of group homes and state employees charged with placing residents of state institutions into community facilities.

Usdane said the two-year-old clinic has received its funding — \$140,000 a year — from the budget of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook. State officials, he said, believe the center is not an appropriate source of funding for the program because many of the clinic's clients have never been associated with the institution.

The assistant commissioner said he believes the clinic can obtain ample funding for its treatment program through reimbursement by Medicaid and private insurance policies.

"We believe that the basic clinic operation can become self-

sufficient through Medicaid and other third-party payments," he said.

Over the next month, Usdane said, his agency will make a determination about the future of the consultation and diagnostic services. "If it is essential we will have to determine how best to fund it," he said.

But Dr. Richard Pearlman, associate director of the North Richmond Mental Health Center, said the clinic's work cannot be split into separate functions, each with its own funding mechanism.

"We provide a comprehensive program and there is no way to separate out one portion of it without hurting our effectiveness," Pearlman said.

Despite the center's differences with the state, Pearlman said he is optimistic the program will continue well past October 30.

"I am optimistic primarily because there is no other service for these clients anywhere," Pearlman said.