

State-union negotiations begin

By BRUCE ALPERT
Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — Gov. Carey's chief labor negotiator said yesterday that the state is entering negotiations with unions representing 160,000 workers "between a rock and a hard place." Meyer S. Frucher, director of the governor's Office of Employee Relations, said the unions will be submitting "legitimate demands" for higher salaries and benefits just as federal budget cuts and tax reductions threaten to significantly reduce state revenues.

Negotiations for a new contract with unions representing state workers, including employees of the Staten Island Developmental Center, South Beach Psychiatric Center and Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, are set to begin next month. Contracts expire with most state employees on March 31.

William L. McGowan, president of the Civil Service Employees Association, the state's largest union with over 100,000 members, said he won't back down on demands for a "fair contract" because of the state's fiscal difficulties.

"We're through subsidizing the

state," said McGowan, noting that his members have consistently received contracts lower than the rate of inflation.

McGowan said he expects negotiations will be "tough" and "lengthy," but he refused to say what kind of wage increase the union will be seeking.

"They'll (state negotiators) walk in and tell us 'we're broke and we have no money,'" McGowan said. "In that sense, it won't be any different than in the past."

Frucher and McGowan appeared together yesterday at a press conference announcing approval of a \$220,000 federal grant to train mental retardation therapy aides in physical and other therapy skills.

The federal funds, supplemented by \$178,000 from the state and Civil Service Employees Association, will be used for demonstration projects at five developmental centers, including one each in Manhattan and the Bronx, according to Charles Devane, director of Human Resources Services for the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Devane said there are no immediate plans to offer the pro-

gram at Staten Island Developmental Center, which is threatened with a huge job loss as the state moves to comply with a consent decree requiring the virtual emptying of the institution.

The retardation official noted that the Willowbrook institution benefited from an earlier training program for therapy aides and that the Bronx and Manhattan centers are now sending more clients into community

residences than the Island facility.

Initial training under the demonstration project will be provided for 240 of the state's 17,000 therapy aides. If it is successful, Frucher said, the state might fund similar programs at all of the state's developmental centers.

The program, Frucher said, tackles two problems: The shortage of clinical experts to work with the state's multiply-handicapped individuals in community programs, and the changing nature of care needed by deinstitutionalized patients.