

All layoffs avoided at Willowbrook

Virtually all layoffs projected in the 1981-82 state budget for the Staten Island Developmental Center will be averted, according to Dr. Ella Curry, the center's director.

The budget's \$38.5-million allocation to the Willowbrook center for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1982, projected the reassignment or dismissal of more than 700 workers.

Dr. Curry said the state has found jobs for 300 workers at other developmental centers and group homes. A delay in transferring residents out of the center and into the community, she said, will safeguard the jobs of those remaining at the center — at least through the end of the fiscal year.

"As the director of the center, I can say that at this particular time it appears very unlikely that we will make any reductions in the staff," Dr. Curry said.

Under the budget projections, the Island institution was to reduce its residential population from 960 to 250 by the end of the fiscal year. But now it appears that at least 650 residents will remain under center care through next spring, Dr. Curry said.

The state is under the mandate of a 1975 consent decree to lower the center's population to 250. It once housed more than 6,000 residents.

Dr. Curry said the center currently has 820 clients and a staff

of 2,900. Another 448 residents are being cared for by United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State on the grounds of the developmental center.

The director said that state developmental centers and state-operated group homes are under a directive to give employees of the Island center first crack at available jobs. In addition, she said, a "continuity of employment" program began three weeks ago to help prepare center staff to assume other positions in the state's retardation system.

John Jackson, president of the center's Civil Service Employees Association chapter, representing 2,180 employees, said he is seeking to negotiate an agreement with state mental retardation officials to provide job security for his members.

Jackson said transfers to off-Island developmental centers and group homes are not viable alternatives for many center employees because they lack transportation to get from their homes on the Island and New Jersey.

The chapter president said he will be pushing to keep the Island center, once known as Willowbrook State School, open permanently with a census of more than the 250 clients called for by the consent decree.

"We definitely want all of our employees to stay on the payroll," Jackson said. "And we think there is definitely a need for the care we provide."

The guiding force behind the consent decree is the belief by most retardation experts that the retarded can better reach their potential in community-like settings, as opposed to large institutions such as the Island center.

State officials said that they can rearrange their budget to include a larger allocation to the Island developmental center — thereby averting layoffs — by taking funds assigned to group homes and community residences that have not yet opened.

BRUCE ALPERT