

Carey's group home policy draws senator's criticism

Advance City Hall Bureau

State Sen. Frank Padavan accused the Carey administration yesterday of "expensive group homes for the mentally retarded.

Padavan, a Queens Republican, suggested the state has restricted the size of group homes to 15 beds because larger facilities, although cheaper, would not qualify for federal Medicaid funds.

It costs between \$46,000 and \$51,000 annually to care for each patient in a Medicaid-funded facility, according to the senator, while other state-funded community residences cost between \$22,000 and \$33,000 per patient annually.

"Unfortunately, I suspect the state is exploiting federal largesse simply because the money is there for the taking," he said.

Padavan, who chairs the Senate Mental Hygiene Committee, made his remarks while presiding over a hearing in the World Trade Center.

Since 1977, Padavan said, Medicaid spending on group homes for the mentally retarded has risen from \$299 million annually to \$820 million. By April 1983, he added, 78 percent of group homes statewide will conform to the Medicaid model.

Sen. William Smith, a Chemung County Republican, echoed Padavan's complaint that the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities has failed to contain the operating costs of its community-based facilities.

Smith said he was preparing legislation that would reduce the authority of mental retardation officials, giving the Health Department the responsibility to license, budget and audit group homes.

"This bill would assign oversight responsibility to the proper authorities, thereby improving the fiscal integrity of the program," Smith said.

The federal government funds 50 percent of the Medicaid program, while the state and localities each pay for 25 percent.

Zygmund Slezak, acting state mental retardation commissioner, testified, in response to questioning by Padavan: "There is no question about it. We try to capture as many federal dollars as we can." But Slezak defended state facilities as "a system that will protect the dignity of our clients."

Slezak said 115,000 mentally retarded people live in New York state and 35,000 of them need state-sponsored housing, in either group homes or institutions.