

Care providers learn that state doesn't provide

By SHEILA CHASE

Delays in the dispersal of state funds has left many Island foster care providers without money for more than two months.

The state government's transition to a more sophisticated and complex accounting system, called Generally Accepted Accounting Procedures (GAAP), is swelling the backlog of payment vouchers which normally exists at this time of year. The overflow has caused several problems among which is delay of reimbursement to people who provide foster care to the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled on Staten Island.

Payments remain months behind despite the fact that foster care has been given a high priority in the office of Audit and Control, according to Thomas Shirtz, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Many people who care for clients from the Staten Island Developmental Center have not received state payments in two months. Delays also affected senior citizens from the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions program at the center who depend on small, biweekly stipends to supplement incomes fixed below subsistence level. Providers said they were not told the reason for the delay.

Mildred Nitto cares for five mentally retarded adults in her Stapleton home. The state owes her \$1,876 in reimbursement for client care. Her husband is on disability and she has two teen-

age children. She has appealed to both the developmental center and the state agency, but said she was never given an explanation for the delay.

She was told to expect the money by last Friday and it did not arrive.

Meanwhile she said she must borrow money, even from two of the clients who are employed under the center's Work for Pay program, in order to buy food for everyone.

Mrs. Nitto said only \$1,330 is owed her for the April-May period of GAAP implementation and that \$546 is owed for January-February, prior to the March 15 switchover to GAAP. She said in 12 years of providing foster care she has never experienced such long delay. She added, "We're going to make it one way or the other," and that when the back money arrives, "we'll be OK."

Senior citizens who are foster grandparents for mentally retarded children or senior companions for retarded adults work a 20-hour week for a weekly stipend of \$40, normally received every two weeks. They received no money for two months and were finally paid three-fifths of the money last Tuesday. A requirement for their participation in the program is a yearly income of less than \$5400.

Several of the grandparents and companions said it was difficult for them to pay utility bills and even to buy food without the stipend.

Program director Nettie Evans said that though they hadn't been getting paid, none of the 55

grandparents or companions employed at the developmental center have missed work. Burgos said, "It's more important to take care of the clients."

The agency was told to expect its money last week and though it has received some of it, is still on financial tenderhooks awaiting news of a proposed 19 percent cut in its federal funding.

Normal processing time for vouchers from agencies to the state is two weeks, said Marvin Nailor, spokesman for state comptroller Edward Regan. But he said the delay, due to both to GAAP and regular end-of-fiscal-year deluge of vouchers has lengthened turnaround time to three to four weeks. Months-long delays come because agencies have deficit budgets, have filled out vouchers incorrectly or have not submitted them, he said.

The developmental center did not receive the correct forms for GAAP until the end of April, according to Deputy Director James Walsh. He said all vouchers were submitted about three weeks ago and that providers should receive reimbursement for two and one half months very soon.

At the moment the state comptroller's office is working with a backlog of approximately 70,000 vouchers for agencies statewide. Payments to commercial service and supply providers as well as individuals have been held up as a result. The center owes its fuel supplier \$1.2 million and New York Telephone Co. \$600,000.

Walsh said vouchers have finally been submitted to Albany and payment approved for money owed for last year and which Walsh said comprises most of the debt.

GAAP was implemented on March 15 after an experimental period. Replacing a 12-year-old checkbook-style program, it is supposed to keep better track not only of how much money is being spent, but what it is being spent on. It is also supposed to be more efficient in the long run.