

Workers are warned of 248 job losses at Willowbrook

By MARK LABATON

Nearly 300 Staten Island Developmental Center workers have been told that they might be fired, demoted or transferred to other mental health facilities because of state budget cuts, the Advance has learned.

Letters signed by Joseph P. Costello, director of personnel for the center, were sent to the workers after the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities announced, on July 27, that it would eliminate 248 positions at the center by October.

Developmental center and Office of Mental Retardation officials said a reduction in the facility's staff of about 2,400 is necessary because of cuts in 1982-83 budget allocations. Gov. Hugh Carey had called for a staff reduction of 1,119 employees by March 31, 1983 in his budget proposal earlier this year.

"As a result of funding cuts," Costello's letter said, "there may

be a reduction in the number of positions in the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. There is a possibility that you may be separated from state service, required to vertically bump, or retreat to a different title at a lower salary grade, or you may be assigned to another location in the same title and salary grade."

The letter informed employees of their civil service rights and suggested that put their name on a list so they could be placed at other facilities.

William Knowlton, a spokesman for the state Office of Mental Retardation, said yesterday that workers notified held "jobs that could not be justified." Developmental center officials gave the state Office of Mental Retardation a list of the positions that they thought were needed least, and workers received letters on the basis of how much seniority they held, said James Walsh, dep-

Layoffs

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uty director of the facility.

Developmental center officials made the list of jobs to be eliminated in accordance with New York's deinstitutionalization program and a court consent decree that mandates how the facility must reduce its clientele.

He said that he did not know how many people would be laid off as a result of the elimination of the 248 positions.

"The most senior employees have the opportunity of going to another facility in New York," Walsh said. "Hopefully, they will continue to have that opportunity before forced layoffs occur."

Walsh also said that layoffs

would be reduced "substantially" if the developmental center regains control of two buildings operated by the United Cerebral Palsy Association and housing 118 patients.

About 80 positions could be saved if developmental center officials succeed in negotiations to take over the two buildings, Walsh said.

But a group of seven workers told the Advance that morale at the developmental center has been low since workers were notified of the possible layoffs.

"I think that everyone is so frightened by this list," one employee said.

Two unions, representing most of the workers at the Willowbrook center, have filed grievances with the Office of Mental Development, charging that no permanent union worker should be fired or relocated while work is being contracted out to non-union workers.

Local 429 of the Civil Service Employees Association, which represents 1,889 workers including cleaners, drivers, barbers, carpet fitters and food service employees, filed its complaint yesterday, and Division 280 of the Public Employees Federation, which represents 490 professional workers, filed a grievance late last month.

"If anyone is laid off or moved, the contract people must go first," said Willamya Thompson, chief council leader for Division

280. "I believe if all the contract people go first then there will be no need for layoffs of our members or they wouldn't be forced to work in Brooklyn, Queens or the Bronx."

According to union representatives, laundry employees, recreational personnel and some nurses are being employed as contract employees. In addition, union representatives say workers at the two United Cerebral Palsy Associations buildings are contract employees.

Ms. Thompson said that Division 280 will take its grievance to an independent arbitrator and then to court if the Office of Mental Retardation does not resolve the issue to the unions satisfaction.