

# Lehrman: Sell some Willowbrook land

By BRUCE ALPERT

Republican gubernatorial hopeful Lewis Lehrman suggested yesterday that state officials consider selling surplus land at the Staten Island Developmental Center to finance new community residences and the retraining of center workers who face layoffs.

Lehrman, who said a state plan to "make better and more socially productive uses" of the 330-acre Willowbrook center for the retarded is overdue, made his comments in a 10-page position paper.

The paper, which also advocated changes in the state's community placement program, was released after Dr. Ella Curry, the center's director, led the candidate on an hour-long tour of the Willowbrook facility.

Alluding to findings by a state consultant that there would be a "strong market" for a condominium development at the state center, Lehrman said private development "should be considered" as part of a master plan that also takes account of recreational and other needs of Staten Island residents.

"Proceeds from any land sale," he said, "should be placed in a special Willowbrook Trust Fund, which would be used to build or rehabilitate housing that is suitable for the retarded to live in. The trust fund would also be used to retrain those present employees at Staten Island Developmental Center so that they could provide proper therapy in the new residential settings."

The state recently sent notices to 250 of the center's 2,400 employees, warning that they might be fired, demoted or transferred to another facility because of reductions in the center's patient census.

Dr. Curry, who said Lehrman seemed impressed with programs being provided for the center's 700 residents, declined

comment on his position paper.

"If I were to make a comment, it would seem like I'm running for governor," Dr. Curry said. "And that's not a job I want."

Lehrman, who is being challenged by former US. Attorney Paul Curran in the Republican gubernatorial primary, also made the following observations in his position paper:

- Pressure from a federal court judge to rapidly move residents out of the Staten Island Developmental Center and into the community has resulted in some inappropriate placements, including the transfer of profoundly retarded and multiply handicapped residents into small apartments where proper medical backup is very expensive. The time pressure, he said, also has prevented the state from becoming a "prudent buyer of group homes."

- The state should appeal a decision by the same federal judge, John R. Bartels which rejected a state proposal to place center residents in group homes with a capacity of more than 10 — the limit established by the consent decree. Lehrman said the state should also move for other changes in the consent decree — signed by Gov. Hugh Carey in 1975 as a blueprint for improved care for the retarded — to reflect "the proven experience" of state officials in caring for the retarded.

- A state plan to convert community residences and developmental centers into intermediate care facilities is a mistake. Although intermediate care facilities, unlike other community residences, are funded by the federally subsidized Medicaid program, they often are more expensive, in the long run, for state and local governments, he said. That is because, Lehrman said, the requirements for intermediate care facilities often mandate unnecessary, but expen-

sive, care for residents of group homes.

- Strict adherence to the requirements of the consent decree have hurt the mentally retarded living in upstate developmental centers because it has forced the state to spend much of its limited resources to benefit present and former residents of the Willowbrook center.

- Despite criticism, the state's community residence program has been "one of the least understood success stories in New York State." He noted that it costs \$53,000 to keep a mentally retarded person in a developmental center, compared to \$33,000 in a state-run group home and \$22,000 in community residences operated by private, non-profit organizations.

William Knowlton, spokesman for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said the agency is pleased that Lehrman has "recognized the success" of the state's community placement program. He declined comment on other findings by Lehrman, pending study of his position paper.