

Psych center staffing may disrupt services

By BRUCE ALPERT

The South Beach Psychiatric Center faces a major staff turnover and disruption of services if a state policy governing seniority is not altered, a union official said yesterday.

Under the policy, employees being laid off from Staten Island Developmental Center can replace South Beach employees with less seniority. Sixty employees at the Willowbrook center for the retarded are scheduled to be terminated next week and an additional 240 in February or March.

"What we have is a major potential for disrupting our services," said George Boncoraglio, president of the South Beach chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association.

Boncoraglio fears that as many as 50 percent of the laid-off Staten Island Developmental

Center employees will try to "bump" his members out of jobs.

And he contends workers accustomed to working with the retarded will not necessarily be able to adjust to working with psychiatric patients.

The jobs considered most vulnerable at South Beach are mental hygiene therapy aides — workers that provide direct care for the center's 350 patients.

The Staten Island Developmental Center is losing jobs as its patient census declines under the state's deinstitutionalization policy.

Many of the Willowbrook center's employees are either residents of Staten Island or New Jersey and would prefer to keep working on the Island, according to their union representatives. That is why so many are requested employment at South Beach.

Boncoraglio, however, has filed a grievance procedure asking that the Staten Island Developmental Center workers be assigned to facilities throughout New York City — thereby limiting the affect on any one facility.

The state Office of Employee Relations is expected to rule on the grievance next week.

South Beach administrators, who already face a loss of federal funding because of alleged violations of standards for supervisory personnel and pharmacy procedures, are also unhappy about losing employees.

"Our existing staff is well trained, highly motivated and competent to meet the needs of psychiatric patients," said center spokesman Ira Kleiman. "We hope that any plan for excess staff from Staten Island Developmental Center would be equitable and appropriate for our employees and our patients."