

WILLOWBROOK SHOCKER

Say budget cuts
may force 700
to return there

By **FREDRIC DICKER**
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ALBANY — Seven hundred retarded New York City residents face a nightmarish forced return to the infamous Willowbrook Developmental Center because the Cuomo Administration won't provide enough money to the group caring for them.

That was the shocking charge made yesterday by Robert Schonhorn, executive director of the State United Cerebral Palsy Assn., after a tense meeting here with top Cuomo aides.

"It means true deprivation for these people. It means a lack of training, it means cockroaches and mice, and it means people having to eat where they defecate," Schonhorn charged.

Schonhorn said UCP, which is running a \$6 million deficit, was being forced to return its 700 clients to Willowbrook by the state's refusal to provide reasonable reimbursement rates for client care.

In addition, he said UCP's 2000 employes, who care for the clients, were also on the verge of being fired.

"We came up here today thinking we would reach an agreement with the state, but we we're schmucks," said an outraged Schonhorn, who has headed the UCP, for more than a decade.

"I told the state to shove their offer. I've got 10 years of my life wrapped up in this, I wasn't polite to them. When they needed help with Willowbrook in 1977 they came to us, now they're trying to do this.

"If we don't have an agreement with the state by March 15, that's it. We give the state 90 days notice and shut down our programs."

State officials denied

last night that they were seeking a confrontation with the UCP and expressed the hope that an agreement would be reached which would prevent the forced return to Willowbrook.

"I think what the problem is is that UCP appears to have been spending its funds at a rate substantially in excess of the rate which was approved for them last year," said Henrik Dullea, director of state operations.

However, Schonhorn said he was at a loss to explain the state's stand:

"It's confusion and incompetence. They won't even explain to us why they haven't told us how much money we're entitled to," he said.

Meanwhile, another top UCP official, Cora Hoffman, charged the Cuomo Administration may be trying to force the transfer of the retarded persons to state-run Willowbrook as part of an effort to aid the Civil Service Employees Association, the largest state union.

"If these people go to the state then CSEA would have more jobs for people to look after them," said Hoffman, a former special assistant to the state commissioner for mental retardation.

Cuomo has proposed the layoff of more than 7000 state workers, many of whom are members of CSEA.

The dispute with the state centers on how much UCP will receive for the care and training of each of the retarded persons it supervises.

Schonhorn says UCP is able to care for its clients at a cheaper rate than the state, while providing much better care.

"It costs us about \$156 a day while the state average is \$165," he said.