

State studying Beth Rifka Home for patient housing

By RON DesJARLAIS

A state agency is expected to complete within the next several days its study into the cost-effectiveness of moving people in state institutions into the former Beth Rifka Nursing Home on Targee Street, Concord.

The agency, the Facilities Development Corp., is conducting the study for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MRDD), which wants to lease the vacant four-story building to relocate residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center (formerly Willowbrook State School) and other state institutions.

MRDD's proposal surfaced on the day the bank that owns the building expected to get it back

from the custody of federal Bankruptcy Court in Manhattan, which has blocked a foreclosure sale of the property since 1977. The bank, Washington Federal Savings and Loan, claims it has since lost several million dollars as a result.

MRDD's proposal was presented March 17 at a closed Bankruptcy Court hearing by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, who was assigned to recover state Medicaid money stolen by Bernard Bergman, the convicted nursing home czar.

Bergman, because of his still-

unsettled 1977 bankruptcy, still owns part of the Beth Rifka property. If Washington Federal is allowed to proceed with its foreclosure sale, Clark would lose Bergman's 40-percent share of the property, which he would put toward Bergman's restitution.

Bergman was ordered to pay back \$2.5 million in restitution, Clark was authorized to sell off Bergman's dozens of nursing homes. The debt, however, was recently estimated to be \$1.4 million, half of which is interest on the principal owed. Clark has not returned repeated telephone calls.

MRDD hopes to lease the building in an effort to comply with a court mandate ordering the state to move people in state institutions into smaller homes.

The agency's "preliminary investigations" found the building to be "well-suited."

The proposal, however, has been criticized because the building has a capacity of 240 beds and, according to the critics, would not offer the deinstitutionalized setting sought by the court.