

Mental health nominees queried

By DAN JANISON
Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — Nominees for the state's two top mental health jobs will soon face public grilling on how well they can guide sensitive services through tough fiscal straits.

Arthur Y. Webb, with a background in the state's Social Services Department, will be the subject of a Senate hearing Friday as Gov. Mario Cuomo's choice to head the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Republican leaders are set to question Webb about his lack of experience in mental health. Some private groups in the field have already expressed that concern here.

The post includes overseeing administration of the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook.

The other nomination before a Senate panel is for commissioner of the Office of Mental Health, for which Cuomo has nominated Dr. Steven E. Katz.

Katz currently heads a mental health program at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, and is involved in a variety of mental health activities.

Senate Mental Hygiene and Addiction Control Committee Chairman Frank Padavan, R-Queens, will want assurance that someone of Katz's varied activity "will be a full-time commissioner," a spokesman for

Padavan said.

"We're talking about a \$1.2-billion budget," noted the spokesman, Ed DeCosmo.

Among Katz's duties if confirmed will be overseeing the South Beach Psychiatric Center, where layoffs of direct-care employees have led to problems for the institution's outpatient services.

Any chance for quick confirmation that Cuomo held out when the Senate convenes here a week from today was removed when Padavan posted the hearing notices late last week.

Both hearings are slated for 10 a.m. on their respective scheduled dates at the State Office Building, 24th floor hearing room, at 270 Broadway in Manhattan.