

SIDC to seek new deadline

By JULIE MACK
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The Staten Island Developmental Center expects to reduce its patient population to 250 by April 1, 1986 — five years after the original deadline and a year after the latest deadline — according to Arthur Y. Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD). Webb also said he wants to empty the institution by the end of 1987. He outlined his proposed timetable last week in a meeting at the center.

But his plan is contingent on approval from U.S. District Court Judge John R. Bartels, who is overseeing the depopulation of the center. The center currently has a 1985 deadline for the reduction to 250.

OMRDD officials have talked with the center's court-appointed special master about extending the deadline, an agency spokesman said. However, OMRDD has not made a formal request for an extension and no court date has been scheduled yet.

Court approval is necessary because of a 1975 agreement signed by former Gov. Hugh L. Carey to settle class action lawsuits charging the state with neglectful care of the 5,700 patients at what was then Willowbrook State School.

The depopulation of the institution is part of that agreement, which originally stated that the institution must reduce its rolls to 250 patients by 1981. Since then, the state has asked for several extensions.

OMRDD officials have said in past months that they are confident that they can obtain another extension as long as they

retain only the 90 acres with the group homes and the Institute of Basic Research.

Webb said his agency must move aggressively to meet the deadlines he has established, but "this can be done," he said.

Webb noted that his proposal goes beyond the original plan to keep a 250-patient facility at the center. He said the main advantages of his plan is lower costs and a better quality of life in the smaller, community-based residences.

Community residences are also cheaper to run, he said, citing figures of \$71,000 a year to maintain a patient at the center and less than \$50,000 per patient in a community residence.

Moreover, Webb said, keeping a 250-bed facility at the center would entail renovating several of the current buildings at a cost of \$19.7 million. The four new group homes, which he says will be sufficient to care for the remaining native Islanders at the center, can be built for \$16.2 million.

Among the new residences in the second phase will be four group homes on the grounds of the center, Webb said. The homes — two 12-bed and two 24-bed facilities — will be built on a tract of undeveloped land on Forest Hill Road between the Institute of Basic Research for Mental Retardation and a row of former staff houses which now serve as group homes.

After the center is closed, Webb said, OMRDD will give up almost 300 acres of land on the Willowbrook campus and more than 40 brick buildings. It will

show progress in moving patients out of the institution. They have said the process has been slowed by problems in establishing community residences, many of which have met with strong community opposition.

To bring the patient population down to 250 by 1986, OMRDD must move about 600 mentally retarded patients out of the center within the next two years, Webb said.

To that end, the state plans to open 81 community residences within the next two years, including 439 beds operated by non-profit voluntary agencies and 283 beds in state-operated community residences.

Webb said the move of 600 patients constitutes the first phase of a two-part plan to shut down the center. Gov. Mario Cuomo announced the institution's eventual closing in his annual January message to the state Legislature.

The second phase of OMRDD's plan involves moving the remaining 250 patients from the center into the community by the end of 1987. That will entail 23 new community residences, with 43 beds operated by voluntary agencies and 234 beds in state-operated facilities.