

By MARGARET SCHERF
WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government is threatening to cut off money to some institutions for the mentally retarded if "appalling" conditions found during recent inspections are not corrected, says Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler.

Mrs. Heckler told the Senate subcommittee on mental health yesterday that the department recently inspected 17 intermediate-care facilities for the mentally retarded and found all were substandard, with nine having major health and safety

deficiencies.

"I assure you, Mr. Chairman, that I find this situation appalling," Mrs. Heckler told the subcommittee chairman, Sen. Lowell Weicker, R-Conn. "And I find it unacceptable."

(The Advance reported on Page 1 yesterday that the Staten Island Developmental Center was among those facilities that could lose funds, and detailed conditions discovered there dur-

ing a February visit by federal inspectors.)

Mrs. Heckler said that where substandard conditions were found, state Medicaid directors were given 30 days "to give us a firm, detailed plan for correcting those deficiencies within 180 days. Failure to deliver an acceptable plan or inadequate implementation of that plan will result in termination of the facil-

ities from the Medicaid program."

Mrs. Heckler said HHS inspectors found many facilities had filthy kitchens, poor menu planning, inadequate training of patients to feed themselves and lengthy delays in serving meals.

Some were not meeting sanitation and physical environment standards, with heating, ventilation, cleanliness and general maintenance deficiencies com-

mon, she said.

"In some places we found very high usage of major tranquilizers, usually in the absence of effective behavior management programs designed to reduce dependency on these chemical restraints," Mrs. Heckler said. "One facility was found to use major tranquilizers with 36 percent of the clients; we normally become alarmed with a 20 percent rate of usage."

Some facilities had fire protection deficiencies such as improper fire walls and doors. "In one case, we found large numbers of clients who were not capable of self-preservation living in residences that could not protect the clients in the event of fire," Mrs. Heckler said.

"We decided this condition constituted an immediate threat to the clients' safety, and we terminated the facility's Medicaid agreement. The action has prompted the state to take immediate action to correct this life-threatening situation."