

SIDC client transfers questioned upstate

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — The transfer of clients from Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) to another state center near here has irked some area parents and advocates for the mentally retarded.

Officials of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities defended the transfers as a necessary part of the court-ordered phase-out of the center in Willowbrook.

But those concerned with retarded residents in the Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center in Niskayuna have been quoted as saying the infusion of clients from downstate has hurt service to those from the local area who they feel should be given special consideration.

Heck Director Fred Finn has publicly denied any decline in service.

Statements in defense of the movement of the clients coincided with a study showing about 12,400 New Yorkers await placement in supervised group homes for the mentally and developmentally disabled.

OMRDD spokesman Lou Ganim said that as some of the 12,400 clients move into programs with less supervision, group home accommodations for about 8,400 more people will be needed over the next six years.

The study was conducted by the state office and surveyed both private and governmental agencies.

Conflicting figures were issued yesterday. Eleanor Pattison, acting president of the Board of Visitors at the Heck facility, said she heard half of those in Heck were from downstate. Ganim, however, said 228 of the center's 304 residents are from the six-county Capital District, and only 46 are from downstate, with the rest coming from elsewhere.

Asked about the number of clients transferred to Heck, Assembly Mental Health Committee Chairwoman Elizabeth Connelly, D-West Brighton, said, "It would fit the plan."

SIDC is under court order to phase out operations, and every one of its residents is ultimately committed by law to getting a

bed in a community residence facility. Transfer to another center is supposed to be temporary.

Approximately 700 at the Willowbrook facility are still waiting to be transferred.

Ganim said the price of property in the city prohibits transfers there.

As for Mrs. Pattison, Mrs. Connelly said, "She may be right that there's a delay in placement" at Heck from the local area. "That I wouldn't question."

Another result of the transfers this year from the SIDC is a "significant loss of staff" there, she said.