

Union says 1,400 SIDC jobs can be saved

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

A state employees' union says its not too late to prevent the elimination of more than 1,400 jobs over the next two years at the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC).

Options include opening new state facilities on Staten Island which would employ the laid-off workers or transferring SIDC employees to jobs at College of Staten Island, which may acquire the SIDC campus, said spokespersons for the Civil Service Employees Association

(CSEA). The union represents SIDC's non-professional staff.

"(The layoffs) are an economic hardship for the region. Some of the SIDC workers will find other jobs, many of them in state service, but a good number of them will not. The unusual commuting and geographic considerations of Staten Island cannot be dismissed lightly," union official Denise Berkley said in an address to about 75 state legislators at a CSEA legislative brunch yesterday in Manhattan.

While preventing the SIDC layoffs is only one of the union's

many objectives for 1985, the job cuts — which were announced last week — were mentioned frequently at yesterday's gathering.

The SIDC employees are only a small percent of CSEA's 220,000 members, said union spokesman Stephen Madarasz, but the layoffs are symptomatic of what is happening to mental health care across the state. "The real problem is not SIDC but the larger picture," Madarasz said.

The layoffs are necessary because the institution, which cur-

rently houses about 700 mentally retarded clients, is scheduled to close by 1987 as part of the state's effort to transfer the mentally disabled to community residences.

"We realize the mental health system is not working and that it is in need of a major overhaul, but we are concerned about the direction the state is moving in," Madarasz said.

The union objects to the transfer of SIDC clients to upstate institutions to await community placement. CSEA officials have maintained that clients should be kept at SIDC until the com-

munity beds are available. Moreover, the union is upset over a recent state report which advocates contracting with private agencies for community-based services rather than operating the services with state employees.

Madarasz says the CSEA would like to stem the layoffs by opening either state-operated group homes on the grounds of SIDC or by establishing state-operated day programs on the Island.

"The layoffs start in May and we're not going to stop them, but maybe we can limit them to 700 or 500," Madarasz said. "We view 1,400 as a worse-case scenario."

But Madarasz conceded that the chances of establishing group homes on the SIDC grounds are slim. While the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities plans to open a 72-bed complex on the southeast corner of the SIDC campus, it has frowned on suggestions of building more residences on the site. OMRDD has already declared its intention to turn the bulk of the Willowbrook property over to the state for redevelopment.

The union submitted its plan for state-operated group homes to a task force studying disposition of the surplus property.

But the union's plan has not been pursued aggressively, Madarasz acknowledged, and "we're not very optimistic" that the plan will be adopted.

However, an agreement on hiring laid-off SIDC employees could be negotiated with College of Staten Island, a leading contender to acquire most of the SIDC campus, according to Tyrone Daniels, president of the SIDC local of the CSEA, and Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly.

Mrs. Connelly, who attended yesterday's brunch, said transferring state employees from SIDC to the college is one possibility, but it is still in the early stages of discussion.

Another possibility for the laid-off employees is early retirement, Mrs. Connelly said. "The state budget office screams whenever we mention early retirement, but maybe here we can work something out," she said. "There are people at SIDC who have worked there for 25 or 30 years but they don't qualify for retirement because they haven't reached age 55.

"I had a man in my office the other day who started at SIDC when he was 19 and he's been there 31 years. What's he going to do now? Retraining isn't going to do much for a person like that."