

State claims progress in mental health care

By JIM HUGHES
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New York State has made considerable progress in the past two years in transferring mentally retarded patients from institutions to community-based residences, a top state official said last night.

Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), told about 75 members of Staten Island Aid Inc., "We've had two good years," he said. "We now have only 10,500 people in institutions and 15,000 people in community residences. That number is growing, and that's the way it should be. People should be in the community."

Webb, the guest speaker at a meeting of the private, non-profit agency at the Institute for Basic Research on the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) campus in Willowbrook, spent much of his talk describing the benefits of the new state budget.

He said OMRDD now has a total budget of more than \$1.063 billion, and said the \$36 million increase over last year's budget will enable his agency to add 1,400 community beds this year

and 1,400 more next year. He said he did not know exactly how many additional beds would be funded on Staten Island.

Webb said the state has been able to improve its services because of volunteer groups like Staten Island Aid, which contracts through OMRDD to operate, among other things, a preschool, education classes for severely and profoundly retarded youngsters, an adult day treatment program and two group residences.

"We got to where we are today because you folks said it would be done," he said.

While he said the state's services have improved, Webb urged the volunteers to push for more community residences on the Island.

"Many communities here are not terribly receptive to community residences, but that doesn't mean we should give up," he said. "It will take a little more work, a little more political massaging, but we'll get it through."

He also told the volunteers, "The national government is hiding in the closet on human services. You've got to hold their feet to the fire."

Commenting further on what

he sees as the federal government's position, Webb said the volunteer sector is "doing something right" but must adopt to "the new rules from Washington."

"The new rules say 'spend less, we don't care how you do it, but spend less.'"

Webb also discussed the closing of SIDC, which he said is still slated for mid-1987. He said he believes the Willowbrook grounds, which are owned by the state, would be best used as the site for a College of Staten Island campus.