

SIDC closing dubbed 'historic'

By DAN JANISON
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — The state's chief of services for the mentally retarded spoke exuberantly yesterday of an "historic moment" when the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) is phased out next year.

Arthur Webb, who heads the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), said it will be "some kind of irony" when the site of nearly 300 acres hosts a merged College of Staten Island campus.

Webb said the sprawling campus's old stone buildings conjure up a kind of "Ivy League atmosphere."

"What was once a symbol of neglect will now be a symbol of excellence," he added.

"It will be an historic moment, April 1, 1987, or thereabouts," he said, referring to the targeted closing date for SIDC. Besides the CSI campus, the plans for the site include more space for the Institute for Basic Research and small residences for current SIDC clients.

Every employee losing a job in the move should have available alternatives, and the state has held job fairs toward that goal, Webb said.

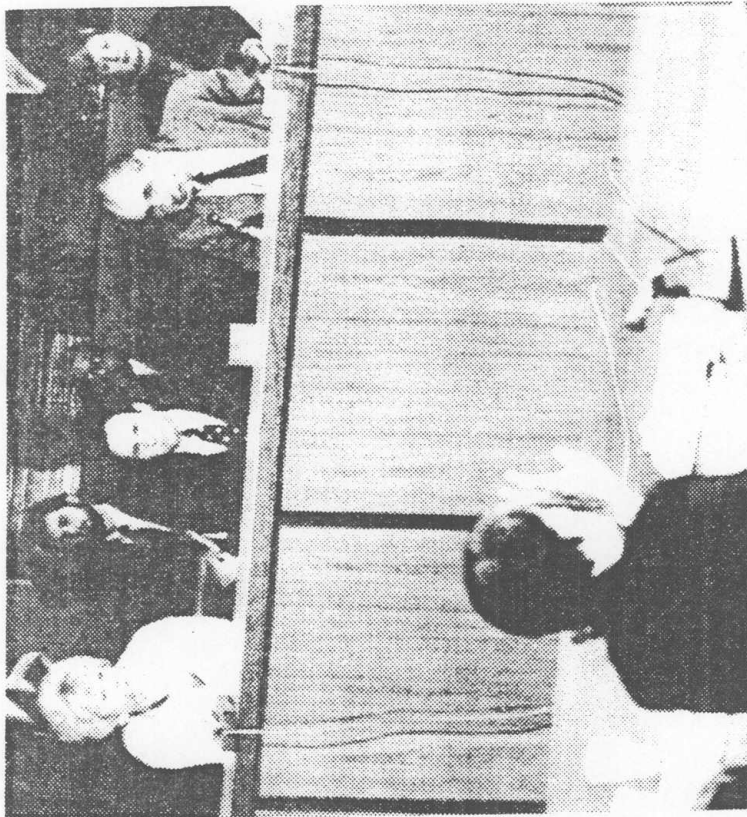
Under questioning from a joint legislative committee on the state budget, Webb added he is "optimistic but realistic" about the future of governmentally funded programs in light of national legislation forcing federal cutbacks.

"Even in the face of federal cuts, in the long term we can abide by the long-range goals of this department," Webb said. "But — and this is a big but" he added, "the state needs more flexibility from certain federal regulation in how programs for the retarded are carried out, Webb said.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, D-West Brighton, sought and seemed to receive assurances from Webb that the number of SIDC acres earlier pledged for mental retardation services will not be reduced.

A final environmental impact statement is due from state officials as early as the next few days, according to Webb. The document is key to an environmental dispute over woodlands adjoining the campus, and two sources said yesterday it has undergone some revision in recent weeks.

Much of Webb's testimony focused on the state's program of taking state clients out of larger institutions and placing them



ADVANCE PHOTOS/JIM SULLEY

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, left, and Sen. John J. Marchi listen to the OMRDD hearing in Albany.

Retardation boss vows to preserve jobs, services

more in smaller group residences on the perimeter grounds of developmental centers.

"Individuals living in these homes would be integrated into community-based day services," as OMRDD words it.

Assemblyman Steven Sanders, D-Manhattan, questioned the idea, saying he believed money proposed for building the small residences on developmental center grounds would better go to housing for the retarded and developmentally disabled "in the community."

During the discussion that followed Webb's prepared testimony, Webb said housing concerns for the retarded statewide are "microcosmic" of the overall housing crunch.

Mrs. Connelly said it takes up to two years to get state services to some clients who need it. Webb said he could not promise a faster response, but that his agency was trying.

She questioned him about property owners who oppose the construction of group homes in their neighborhoods. Webb said he has "toned down the rhetoric" of late while pressing ahead for such housing.

Sen. John J. Marchi, R-Staten Island, spoke of a "collegial" effort on the SIDC matter. Assemblyman Robert Staniere, R-Dongan Hills, asked about the final resolution. Webb said, "We're getting very, very close."

Terrence Benbow, counsel for the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, the group which sued the state for incursions in Corson's Brook Woods, said last night:

"The governor and the governor's staff have been working their way very carefully through a situation that requires reasonable concern for both important values — the disabled and retarded and also the unique environmental factors in Corson's

Brook Woods.

"I have every reason to believe that the final environmental impact statement will have a reasonable solution."

"There are still issues of entrance and egress, and the power plant," at the SIDC site, but "those are marginal issues," Webb said.

In other action around the Capitol yesterday, residents of nursing homes, adult homes and health facilities lobbied for improved Medicaid reimbursements.

Nine elderly Staten Island resi-

dents from four borough facilities were among those who rode up by bus for the day in a trip organized by the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled.

Joan Picone, activities supervisor at the Clove Lakes Nursing Home, Castleton Corners, said visits were made to legislative offices to drum up support for raising personal Medicaid allowances for those in homes. She said the increase would boost their standard of living and cost the state only \$8 million annually.

The coalition also seeks to bring back a \$250 annual clothing allowance for residents, abolished several years ago, Picone said.

The nine residents who attended were from the Golden Gate, New Brighton Manor, Vanderbilt and Clove Lakes homes, she said.



Adele Chambers, a resident of Clove Lakes Nursing Home, traveled to the Albany budget hearings to push for more Medicaid.