

# Battle heats up at state hearing on group homes

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The fight over planned group homes on the grounds of Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) moved to a new battleground yesterday as about 175 people voiced opposition to a statewide group-home plan that includes the SIDC site.

Crowding a hearing room in a state office building in Manhattan, opponents and a small group of supporters testified for more than seven hours in a special hearing on the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) plan to build small residential units (SRUs) on existing institution sites statewide.

The OMRDD plan calls for construction of small, 12-bed units on five institution sites to provide "community-like" settings for people now in institutions. Statewide 96 people are housed in SRUs, and 10 times that amount are projected to live in them by 1991 as part of a plan to eventually transfer 3,000 institutionalized clients to the community, according to OMRDD.

Opponents of the plan call it another form of segregation and a retrenchment of the movement to de-institutionalize mentally retarded and developmentally disabled people. Supporters see it as a halfway house between institutionalization and community integration.

"There's just no possibility that we would accept them (SRUs) as community placements. We haven't worked on the Willowbrook case for 14 years merely to move them (clients) from one part of the campus to another," said

Michael Lottman, the attorney who represented Willowbrook clients in their successful battle to close the scandal-ridden institution.

The group-home plans were discovered "accidentally" in an OMRDD memorandum by Assemblyman Steven Sanders of Queens. Sanders, chairman of the committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation, led the meeting with West Brighton Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, chairman of the committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Developmental Disabilities, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

Louis Ganim, a spokesman for OMRDD Commissioner Arthur Webb, said the SRU plan was not to be made public. Corson's Brook Woods — the group home site on SIDC that is to house 144 clients — and another site in Newark, N.Y. served as a model for the plan.

Until yesterday's hearing, opposition to the site has centered on the environmental concerns about the wetlands character of the site. However, the OMRDD has been given permission to start construction, and says it plans to soon issue an environmental impact statement.

Webb, in 1½ hours of testimony before the Assembly panel, hailed the plan as part of a "revolution" to free the retarded and developmentally disabled people from troubled institutions.

But opponents assailed the group homes as "an isolated, segregated camp," and "an old, discredited idea" that will keep clients from ever leaving institution grounds.

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