

Audit: Mental health facilities in bad shape

By GEOFFREY MOHAN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Penny-pinching at state mental health and mental retardation facilities has left some in poor shape and may cost taxpayers more money in the long run, a state audit has found.

The Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) saved \$118 million allocated for capital improvement from 1980-85, but "failed to properly maintain heating and ventilation systems, windows, sanitary lines, and other facilities... around the state," the audit concluded.

"This penny-wise, pound-foolish approach ends up costing taxpayers more money, because delaying repairs allows problems to get much worse," said Assemblyman Arthur J. Kremer, D-Nassau, chairman of the Legislative Commission on Expenditure Review, which conducted the audit.

The commission inspected 10 developmental centers and 12 adult psychiatric centers statewide, citing "critical" problems at Manhattan and Rockland Psychiatric Centers. These centers will have to spend up to \$40 million to repair steam and sewer lines, according to the audit.

"Serious" problems were pin-

pointed at Long Island Developmental Center and Bronx and Creedmore Psychiatric Centers.

According to the commission, 54 percent of funds allocated to OMH and OMRDD for repairs between 1980 and 1985 went unspent. During that period, capital improvement projects took an average of 20 to 26 months to complete, a time period the commission found costly and unnecessary.

Neither South Beach Psychiatric Center nor Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) were among the facilities highlighted in the commission's report, but ratings on these centers

were appended to the report.

South Beach received "good" to "fair" ratings for its buildings and building systems — including heating, plumbing, electrical, fire alarm and elevator systems.

The facility rated "poor" in sanitary sewers, condition of sidewalks, hot water systems and doors and hardware.

SIDC received similar ratings for its buildings and systems and was criticized as "poor" in electric and water systems and storm drainage. The center is to be phased out to small residences by next year.

The commission called for more inspections by the Facilities

Development Corporation, which oversees OMH and OMRDD facilities, and called on the corporation to fill 21 employee positions funded in the current budget to help conduct the inspections and devise faster implementation of repair projects.