

# Loretto seeking state \$\$

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ADVANCE CITY HALL BUREAU

Officials from the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto, have begun negotiating with state agencies in attempts to secure funding for child-care programs.

A mosaic of funding is being sought even though archdiocesan agencies will continue their contracts with the city pending a court appeal. A federal court decision that forced foster-care groups to provide family planning information jeopardized child care in the city, as the Catholic foster-care centers had planned not to sign the new versions of the contracts.

"I would like to think our child care efforts will be preserved, but there is no guarantee," said Monsignor Robert Arpie, the director of Mount Loretto. "Right now, we're at the stage where we will take the funding wherever we can get it."

Monsignor Arpie is trying to piece together the funding for Mount Loretto on his own, without assistance from city or Catholic Church sources — but he remains close to discussions on child-care concerns with the city Human Resources Administration. The monsignor, who is considered a foster-care expert in archdiocesan circles, is part of a six-person group that represents foster-care agencies in negotiations with the city.

About 400 children are supervised by the Mission — either at Mount Loretto or at six Island group homes — under contracts with the HRA.

The archdiocese reluctantly

cancelled more than \$100 million in foster-care contracts with the city, effective at the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

The move by Cardinal John O'Connor followed a decision in the 14-year-old case of Wilder vs. Bernstein in which a federal court ruled that facilities receiving city funding must provide family planning information, including information on birth control and abortion, practices banned by the Roman Catholic Church.

Mount Loretto's appeal for state aid comes as the archdiocese of New York has petitioned the court for a stay of the decision.

"We had to file an appeal of the decision by the deadline of March 20, and we did that," said Joe Zwilling, a spokesman for the

archdiocese. "We expect that if a stay of the order is granted, we will be able to continue operating our city-funded agencies."

"Our Catholic principles still stand," Cardinal O'Connor said. "If the day comes that the requirement is that to receive a contract we must violate our Catholic principles, then we will not accept any city contracts."

Monsignor Arpie would not discuss the court action, but the director of Mount Loretto did say the Island facilities would be willing to sign an extension of the current contract with the city until the situation is resolved.

"We could never agree to the court's ruling, but we also couldn't shuffle the children out of the foster-care system," Monsignor Arpie said. "There aren't any other places for them to go."

"Legally, if we continue caring for our youngsters, it would be as a 'temporary' measure," he added. "It has been the cardinal's position all along that we should keep doing what we're doing until an alternative is found."

The primary alternative for Mount Loretto is to seek state funding, the monsignor said. Mount Loretto currently does not operate under state contracts, although some state funds from a variety of agencies are funnelled through HRA to the Island facilities.

Monsignor Arpie said he would meet this week with officials from the state Office of Mental Health and directors of the state Division of Youth. The monsignor also said he is close to obtaining funds from the state Office of Mental Re-

tardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD).

"We hope to be signing off on a contract very soon, and that would take some of the burden off of the city," Monsignor Arpie said. "Our immediate goal is to develop a program that would include funding for 50 to 60 youngsters, as well as some of our group home residents."

The state funding for which Mount Loretto is maneuvering may include money for intermediate care facilities for the mentally retarded, according to Ron Byrne, a spokesman for the state OMRDD. Byrne confirmed that negotiations were under way between the state and the Mission.

"The program Mount Loretto is trying to become eligible for is an extension of a grant from the state Education Department," cared for on the South Shore campus of Mount Loretto; another 150 reside in foster boarding homes on the Island.

Earlier this month, Mount Loretto started a nursery program that cares for 12 "boarder babies," infants awaiting placement in homes. Monsignor Arpie said he was interested in starting even more programs, but he is hesitant to do so until he knows where the funding will come from.

"If the city is willing to extend the current contracts and reimburse us for our efforts, then we will stay in business," the monsignor said. "Piecing together the funding is not what the archdiocese would like, but we are confident that the money will come from somewhere."

Byrne said. "In turn, if Mount Loretto signs with us, the individuals in the intermediate care program will also be eligible for Medicaid funding, which is for people with lifelong disabilities."

HRA officials have said they would prefer not to insist on the family planning stipulation with child-care contracts, but Mayor Edward I. Koch says the city will abide with the court ruling. HRA Commissioner William Grinker is expected to announce a plan this month that would either preserve the foster-care contracts with the archdiocese, or facilitate a transition to city-operated foster homes.

Until then, Mount Loretto is still accepting new youngsters into its programs. About 250 children, mostly adolescents, are