

# State cuts won't hamper care for developmentally disabled

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State cuts in care for the mentally retarded that prompted fierce protest in Albany yesterday will chop three positions from the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO).

But not only will service be unhampered here, the local director said, he expects to hire 12 more "direct care" workers for developmentally disabled residents in Island group homes.

The three positions to be cut from the Willowbrook-based SIDDSO, the former Staten Island Developmental Center, are an already-vacant chief housekeeper's slot, an administrative position, and a physician.

The physician's caseload of 12 to 15 clients will be spread among four or five full- and part-time doctors, said Robert Witkowsky, director.

"That will not at all hinder medical services," he said. "All areas will be covered administratively. In my opinion, direct care will not be hindered" by the combined three cuts.

And while union members are fighting direct-care staff cuts elsewhere in the state, Witkowsky said he expects a dozen new community residence aides "within the near future."

Because SIDDSO is the state's "only fully community-based" developmental center, "budget authorizations for staffing fall within an allocation for each individual home," the director said. SIDDSO oversees some 30 group homes, including 13 on the Willowbrook grounds known as the Richmond Complex.

The 12 positions "are already approved by OMRDD (the state Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities)," he said. "Now it's in the state Divi-

sion of Budget. I've been negotiating these items since the third week in August." Though approval is expected, he could not offer a more specific time frame than "the near future."

Meanwhile, Rand Condell, president of the 59,000-member Public Employees Federation (PEF), yesterday led hundreds of union members in a two-hour demonstration outside OMRDD headquarters. Of SIDDSO's three staff cuts, only the physician is a PEF member.

The protesters rallied against 300 planned layoffs that will affect the war on drugs and planning by local governments, as well as the mentally retarded.

A Brooklyn drug testing lab, operated by the state Division of Substance Abuse Services, will close next month, taking 52 state positions with it. The lab performs drug tests for several city departments.

"Who can justify closing an internationally recognized drug-testing and research laboratory in the city known as the crack capital of the world?" Condell asked.

Twenty-eight positions at the Department of State's Office of Local Government Services in Albany are slated to be cut. These professionals provide information on zoning, land-use planning, and other topics to local governments.

The mentally retarded will be hit the hardest, Condell said. At eight developmental centers, more than 229 workers, including nurses, teachers, social workers and recreation therapists, will be cut Oct. 19.

"Why do staffing rosters for the developmental centers show that while the numbers of clients and direct-care staff have diminished dramatically the past two decades, the number of managers has been steadily growing?" he asked.