

Health programs may face the ax

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ALBANY — Two Staten Island voluntary programs for the mentally ill would be abolished under Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's \$46.6 billion budget plan.

Cuomo would eliminate \$115,000 in funding for the South Richmond Advisory Board and \$21,000 for the Port Richmond-based Compeer program, a review by Assembly Mental Health Chairwoman Elizabeth Connelly found.

Mrs. Connelly blasted Cuomo for attempting to close a projected \$2.6 billion deficit by reducing services for society's most vulnerable population.

But Cuomo defended the budget as adequate in his budget message, especially when calculating expansion in the mental health area during his six-year tenure as governor.

The West Brighton Democrat said it is unlikely the Legislature would restore the funding for the two borough programs because of the state's fiscal woes. "Any of the funding the Legislature has added in the past are gone," she said.

"The cuts are really going to hurt. To continue on this path is incredible. We're not anywhere near what we should be doing," Mrs. Connelly said.

"They're not going to balance the budget off the back of these people."

Both voluntary programs work out of the South Beach Psychiatric Center and help provide additional services to clients.

South Beach, however, stands to gain 16 additional positions for its intensive day treatment unit. South Beach was the only psychiatric center in the state to receive additional slots in intensive day treatment, said Mrs. Connelly's counsel Donald Robbins.

Cuomo's aid to localities budget for mental health does not include funding for intensive day treatment. He did include positions in the state operations budget for South Beach at Mrs. Connelly's request.

Mrs. Connelly, who chairs the Committee on Mental Health and Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities, said she opposed 600 targeted layoffs in the mental health area not related to census decline.

Overall, the governor recommends eliminating 2,541 positions in the Office of Mental Health's adult service program. He attrib-

uted most of the layoffs to a 1,200 population decline at psychiatric centers by March 31, 1990 — the end of the next fiscal year. He also calls for slashing 87 staffing slots for children's psychiatric services.

"The psychiatric facilities are currently hard-pressed for staffing," Mrs. Connelly said.

She said she would consider raising additional revenues instead of having the state cut back on vital services for the mentally ill.

Cuomo's budget plan calls for as many as 661 fewer institutional staff positions in the Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities. Most of the reductions are scheduled as part of the Willowbrook Consent Decree to close six developmental centers by 1991. Patients would be transferred to community-based programs or residential settings.

But it also includes a new program called "supported housing" that would reduce by half the cost of a community residence program. About a third of the 2.65 million would provide patients rent stipends and support services, such as counselors.

The plans budgets for the opening of 1,200 beds, including 500 through the supported housing program.

"We have found that not all seriously mentally individuals need or can benefit from the structure and supervision of traditional residential programs. Indeed, some refuse to live in group residences because they reject the restrictions on personal freedom that these programs unavoidably entail," Cuomo said.

Staten Island is expected to receive funds for 71 additional community beds for the mentally ill in the upcoming fiscal year. It was funded for 35 residential beds in the current fiscal year ending March 31.

Cuomo says some of the criticisms of his mental health budget are unjustified. In his budget message, he noted that more than 1,500 beds and 2,700 new days slots are recommended. One thousand additional families will receive support services.

He said care for the mentally disabled has seen "unparalleled expansion" since he became governor in 1983. Under the Willowbrook Consent Decree, the state has moved patients from large institutions to community-based settings.