

**CIVIL SERVICE** By VINCENT LEE**Union hits service cut**

The head of the New York State Public Employes Federation has blasted the state's plan to lay off more than 320 employes who work with the developmentally disabled and mentally retarded as "unjustifiable" and another example of the state's callous plan to cut services for the disadvantaged.

Rand Condell, the president of the 59,000-member union, which represents professionals working in the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said the lay-offs in September will hurt the high-quality care the office's clients have been receiving.

The understaffing may also jeopardize the disbursement of millions of dollars in federal Medicaid funds to the agency's facilities, Condell said.

He also said announcing the lay-offs in July—when state lawmakers are out of session—is a lame attempt to shroud the effects on clients and staff.

"Everyone in state government knows the time to solve staffing and budget problems is during the budget process," which ends on or about the state's April 1 budget deadline, Condell said.

"Announcing a lay-off in mid-July, when state lawmakers are out of session, is disgraceful and outrageous," Condell said.

"State legislators have the responsibility to determine the direction of agencies and departments.

"OMRDD should return to the same timetable other agencies follow and have their budget and staffing levels determined by state lawmakers during the session."

Union officials said the Legislature's intent this session was to preserve jobs and services in state facilities.

On Sept. 20, 330 OMRDD employes, including 133 PEF members, are slated to lose their jobs because of state budget cuts.

"This is another example of the state's disastrous fiscal planning," Condell said. "OMRDD has adequate money to maintain client services performed by state employes. This cut is unjustifiable."

Poor fiscal planning put OMRDD in the crisis, union leaders said.

According to state figures, OMRDD earmarked only \$7 million for work-

ers' compensation and other approved leave this fiscal year. The real need is about \$11 million.

To make up the difference, OMRDD must transfer money from its community-services budget. As a result, staff must be cut and the creation of 1,500 community residence beds may be scrapped.

"The state is taking the senseless, bureaucratic way out and cutting services and staff," Condell said. "New York is again incompetently managing its work force and as a result providing less quality care for those who have no voice or lobby in Albany."

Millions of federal dollars may also be jeopardized if OMRDD staff levels continue to drop, union officials said.

OMRDD clients who are on Medicaid have half their treatment paid for by the federal government. The state pays the rest.

"How does a facility maintain the level of quality care and its certification as it lays off employes?" Condell asked. "It makes no sense."

OMRDD facilities in Staten Island, Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Long Island face similar certification and Medicaid reimbursement problems because of staff shortages.

Union leaders said they are concerned OMRDD is reducing the quality of care for clients and increasing the chance of on-the-job injuries to staff.

"The professionals who face lay-off are generally direct-care, hands-on employes," Condell said. "Their severely handicapped clients will immediately feel the loss of our members' services."

According to Condell, OMRDD facilities are "dangerous places to work" and reducing the number of employes will increase the risk of job-related injuries.

A recent state Civil Service Department study showed direct-care workers in OMRDD and the state Office of Mental Health are the most likely to be injured on the job, either from assaults by clients or from physical efforts, such as lifting clients.

PEF represents about 8,000 professionals, including nurses, therapists, teachers, developmental specialists, and psychologists who work in the OMRDD system.