

Cuomo selects Howe

By **CARL CAMPANILE**
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — Gov. Mario Cuomo, seeking to promote Elin M. Howe commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), nominated her for that post yesterday.

Ms. Howe directed the state's efforts to phase out the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook, formerly the infamous Willowbrook State School.

The nomination is subject to confirmation by the Republican-controlled state Senate. Confirmation hearings will take place next week. She would receive a \$98,399 yearly salary to run OMRDD.

Ms. Howe is currently acting commissioner at OMRDD and previously served as the agency's chief deputy for five years. She would succeed Arthur Webb, who was tapped by Cuomo to head the scandal-scarred Division of Substance Abuses.

Ms. Howe served as director of Staten Island's Developmental Services Office from 1977 to 1980, where she reduced by half the inpatient population and brought the facility into compliance with the Willowbrook Consent Decree. The institution for the mentally retarded closed in 1987.

Cuomo noted that Ms. Howe served in various positions within the state Department of Mental Health and OMRDD for nearly 20 years.

"She has demonstrated a special sensitivity to the needs and concerns of persons with mental retardation and developmental disabilities," he said.

"She played an important role in bringing the Willowbrook developmental center into compliance with a federal court order that signaled New York State's formal commitment to developing a community system of care for those in our institutions."

Assembly Mental Health Chairwoman Elizabeth Connelly, D-West Brighton, said she was pleased with Ms. Howe's appointment. In a Jan. 10 letter, she urged Cuomo to select Ms. Howe.

Mrs. Connelly said she was impressed with Ms. Howe's experience and knowledge of the agency and her performance in serving those with disabilities. She also gave Ms. Howe high marks for managing Willowbrook "during the tough days" of phasing out the facility.