

Rudy's cuts threaten programs for disabled

200 Islanders band together to protest mayor's budget plan

By EILEEN AJ CONNELLY
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Dozens of Staten Island programs for people with developmental disabilities will be forced to shut their doors Jan. 1 if Mayor Rudolph Giuliani does not modify his latest round of budget cuts, advocates said yesterday.

More than 200 Islanders rallied against the cuts in the West Brighton headquarters of the Staten Island Mental Health Society and made plans to fight a budget they said would literally eliminate services run by agencies throughout the city.

One portion of their fight will take place on the steps of City Hall tomorrow at 11 a.m. when parents, clients and workers from agencies in the five boroughs will rally against the budget.

The mayor's budget includes a \$4.42 million cut to the Office of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services for mental retardation programs from January to June 1995, and elimination of \$9.3 million in fiscal years 1996 and 1997. The page

detailed the cuts states the "city is not mandated to provide these services" as the reason behind the funding slash.

About \$2.5 million of this funding goes to services on Staten Island.

Giuliani spokesman Forest Taylor said the city is hoping the state will maintain the matching funds that provide some funding for a portion of the agencies involved.

But Kenneth Pople, executive director of the Staten Island Mental Health Society, said the state Office of Retardation and Developmental Disabilities commissioner has told him the matching funds cannot be provided if the city drops its funding.

"Legally, if the city is not putting in its matching money, then the state by law cannot put in its matching funds," Pople said.

"Every city dollar that's lost, you lose a state dollar."

Taylor maintained the state has a choice. "The state at its discretion can maintain funding," he said.

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"I've had to fight all my life for my son. John has grown in leaps and bounds through Eden and On Your Mark ... and I refuse, and you should refuse, to have these programs close."

— Lucy Buttermark, Graniteville

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