

Staten Island Advance

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Future bleak for mental health care

Island programs face massive cuts from both city and state

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ADVANCE CITY HALL BUREAU

The combined impact of deep state and city funding cuts could turn back the clock on mental health programs on Staten Island, leaving thousands at risk of not being able to find adequate services, warn providers and lawmakers.

"This is completely unacceptable," said North Shore Assembly-

woman Elizabeth Connelly. "People will be out on the streets. You'll be stepping over them. The weaker programs will simply be forced to close."

Gov. George Pataki's barebones budget proposes a \$142 million reduction in mental health funding.

At the same time, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani has proposed slashing \$8 million from mental

health contracts over the next four years. The city proposes to eliminate \$2 million in mental health funding in the spending plan to take effect July 1.

Depending on who's doing the talking, there appears to be at least a glimmer of hope on the city scene.

Some observers feel the city reduction stands a chance of being

rescinded—at least in part. That prediction is based on the successful battle city lawmakers mounted this year to get City Hall to restore vital money for mental retardation and substance abuse services.

But the proposed state cut is another matter, with some state lawmakers conceding it looks like a considerably heavier lift.

As city lawmakers tinker at the margins of Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's proposed \$30 billion budget over the next several months, finding the \$2 million to

The Budget impact:

HEALTH CARE

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plug the mental health hole for next year should not be viewed as an insurmountable task, said North Shore Democrat Jerome X. O'Donovan, a member of the finance committee.

"I think the mayor understands mental health is a priority for us, that we're prepared to really battle for this," O'Donovan said.

In fact there is a budget scenario in this town that runs like this: City Hall will allow the Council to negotiate for some restorations in mental health, youth services and cultural programs but will hold fast on the more than \$1 billion in cuts to entitlements the budget office has spelled out.

One budget source claimed that the mayor simply put the youth,

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