

## THE ISLAND

# Moving institutional care to Brooklyn proposed

By CARL CAMPANILE  
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — Staten Island youths with mental illnesses could be forced to travel to Brooklyn for institutional care if the Pataki administration moves ahead with a plan to close a 10-bed adolescent unit at South Beach Psychiatric Center.

The state Office of Mental Health wants to merge the Staten Island unit with a new 60-bed Brooklyn Children's Psychiatric Center.

The new facility in the East New York section of Brooklyn is expected to open in the fall.

But Staten Island providers of mental health services, union officials and lawmakers are attempting to block the move.

They assert it would be counterproductive for Island teens with mental illnesses and their parents to have to travel to Brooklyn.

"There would be no beds for Staten Island children on Staten Island," said Jerry Gannon, chairman of the Staten Island Mental Health Council's children's committee.

Gannon, borough director of Foundling Hospital, asserted it would more difficult to refer and place the Island's youths under the transfer, because of competing demands for space with youths in Brooklyn and other parts of the city.

The intermediate beds are for youths who need intensive care from 30 to 90 days.

"We're talking about kids who don't get better right away," said Suanne McClenaghan, president of the Mental Health Council.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly (D-North Shore), who formerly headed the mental hy-

giene committee, said she supported opening such a facility to serve Brooklyn.

But she stressed the intent was never to close the adolescent unit at South Beach.

"We don't have enough beds. You're talking about disenfranchising children and families. Those beds will be eaten up by Brooklynites," Mrs. Connelly said.

Mrs. Connelly urged state Mental Health Commissioner James Stone to kill the plan, saying in a letter that the transportation hardship on parents to get to the Brooklyn facility will discourage them from seeking proper care for their children.

But Stone, in a response letter, defended the consolidation plan as a positive development.

He said care for young Staten Island children and teen-agers are now provided at two locations — South Beach and Queens Children's Psychiatric Center.

"The new Brooklyn Children's Center will allow us to develop a comprehensive approach to provide intermediate care for both children and adolescent from Staten Island at one location," Stone said.

Stone pledged to Mrs. Connelly that the state would work with families to help transport parents to the Brooklyn facility, but did not provide specifics.

Further, Stone said he would work to increase the number of acute care beds on Staten Island for children and adolescents with mental illnesses.

Acute care provides residential stays up to 30 days, which would reduce reliance on longer term care for youths, the commissioner said.

To that end, he noted that St. Vincent's Medical Center has filed

a certificate of need to provide the borough with a 10-to-12 bed acute care unit for children and teens, which has been forwarded to the state Health Department.

He also spoke about the development of eight other community/home treatment slots.

But Barry Markman, director of the Public Employees Federation (PEF) union at South Beach Psychiatric Center, said he opposed the move to transfer the Staten Island adolescent unit to Brooklyn.

He argued it was a reduction in service, plain and simple.

"It's outrageous that the Staten Island community has to be serviced in Brooklyn. We feel this is wrong. They're playing shell games. They just don't want to treat more patients," Markman said of the state mental health officials.

PEF represents doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers at South Beach.

In addition, Markman complained that Pataki's original spending plan would slash funding outpatient services by one-third, from \$12 million to \$8 million.

He asserted such a reduction, if sustained, would be disastrous for services and potentially necessitate more layoffs than reported by the Pataki administration.

The bipartisan spending package the Legislature presented to Pataki would restore 20 percent of the cut outlined in the governor's original budget plan for psychiatric outpatient services throughout the state including South Beach, sources said.

Pataki recommended slashing \$34 million and lawmakers added back \$7 million, which leaves a \$24 million cut for the year.