

# Plan to move retarded into community homes angers County Board

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Staff Writers

A state plan to move virtually all mentally retarded people from state hospitals into small community homes has some members of the Hennepin County Board up in arms.

"I support deinstitutionalization" for those who can live in the community, said board Chairman John Derus. But he said "the carte blanche closure" of state hospitals "is a fiscal dagger pointed at the heart of Hennepin County."

The state Department of Human Services and various interest groups negotiated on the plan for several months but failed to reach a consensus.

Several commissioners, including Denis, charged this week that the state will be dumping retarded people

on Hennepin County at high cost to local taxpayers.

Sue Abderholden, executive director of the state Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC), called such allegations absurd, saying that the department's plan would not impose greater costs on the county.

After a public hearing Thursday, where board members sharply spelled out their criticisms, Abderholden said, "I am ashamed at how the County Board acted."

Told of Abderholden's comments, Commissioner Mark Andrew said, "I am ashamed that anyone would be ashamed of the County Board trying to protect the mentally retarded and mentally ill."

There are about 1,400 retarded people in seven state hospitals, now known as regional treatment centers including nearly 400 from Hennepin County and 200 from Ramsey County. The department plan for overhauling the centers calls for moving nearly all the retarded into smaller, community-based homes by mid-1995.

The exceptions would be up to 60 people needing medical care who will be cared for at Faribault Regional Center and up to 35 people diagnosed as retarded and mentally ill who will be cared for at St. Peter Regional Treatment Center.

Human Services officials said yesterday that they have no reason to believe the plan would impose higher costs on Hennepin and other counties. Medicaid pays most of the regional center costs, and the counties pay about 5 percent. The 5 percent share will continue after people move from regional centers to community programs, the department said.

In 1990, the state will take over that 5 percent share, but counties will advance the money for the first six months. In the second half of each year, the state will repay that 5 percent and also will pay what had formerly been the county's 5 percent share for the second six months.

Robert York, assistant Human Services commissioner, said he knows of no added costs the counties would face except the cost of case management and some administrative services. But the department is asking for \$4 million over two years to give to counties for that, he said.

Deputy Commissioner Charles Schultz said the department plans to "work especially diligently with Hennepin County to help with any problems they might encounter."

Nationally, the number of retarded people in state institutions has been dropping steadily, from 195,000 in 1967 to 90,000 today, said Charles Lakin, a research director on retardation at the University of Minnesota.

Lakin told the County Board "there has been little, if any, of the so-called dumping of people who were once cared for in these institutions. The fact is that there are more people with mental retardation in supervised residential care today than there were when deinstitutionalization began 20 years ago."

"The proposed plan dumps no one," insists Bette Rosse, an ARC spokeswoman and parent of a retarded and autistic son. "Every single person is planned for, with continued state funding," she said. "The plan provides for the orderly, planned, fully funded return to Minnesota's communities." Rosse is board vice president of a local group home for autistic and mentally retarded adults.

County Commissioner E.F. Robb said yesterday that he opposes the state's attempt to foist people on the county and make county taxpayers foot the bill. When told deinstitutionalization supporters contend that won't happen, Robb said, "Those are words. We don't see the money."

Denis said he'd visited all the state hospitals and found that profoundly retarded people can be better taken care of there than in the community. He said he was very impressed with the institutions, which have doctors, social workers, psychiatrists and other staff. He said he had "met people who were loving and gave devoted care."

Derus predicted that if state hospitals are closed, in 10 years planners will propose re-establishing them because the hospitals put patients in pleasant surroundings, away from the "maddening pace of the city."

(While uses of hospital campuses would change under the department plan, none would shut down entirely.)

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He said there was "some likelihood that at some point in the future the state will walk away from some of its financial responsibilities" and the county will pick up the slack, despite state intentions not to do it.

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Several social workers appeared before the board, generally supporting the commissioners.

Mary Lee Blomgren, a senior social worker for the developmentally disabled, said placement from regional centers to community centers works only sometimes.

"To me, relationships are what it's all about, not where you live."