

# Faribault prison seems sure, but problems remain

By Sam Newlund  
Staff Writer

The Legislature seems certain to carve a new prison out of the largest state hospital for the retarded, but it is deeply divided about what to do with 1,400 retarded people in institutions across Minnesota.

House and Senate conferees are expected to approve from \$10.7 million to \$14.7 million to create a prison at Faribault Regional Center, one of seven state hospitals housing the re-

tarded.

But the year-old dispute over moving retarded people from institutions such as Faribault to community group homes appears headed for a last-ditch decision. The Senate's human services appropriation bill, which was passed Tuesday, now goes to a separate conference committee to battle the House version.

Expecting get-tough anticrime bills to swell demand for prison space, the House voted \$10.7 million to convert

## **Bills** Continued from page 1B

control of the 500-man prison by mid-1991. It would be a valuable economic cushion for Faribault leaders, who had worried about the loss of jobs caused by declining state hospital populations.

But if the prison is on a fast track for the next biennium, the outlook for the retarded remains unclear. Differences in House and Senate bills are almost as great as the split that divides a number of interest groups that began debating the fate of state hospitals nearly a year ago.

The movement of retarded people from hospitals to group homes had begun long before. But Department of Human Services officials proposed to accelerate the shift by removing all but 95 people from the big institutions, now called regional treatment centers, by mid-1995.

About half the remaining 1,300 people would move to private group homes, officials said. The others would occupy 105 homes of six or fewer beds to be run by the state.

Some parents objected on freedom-of-choice grounds. Hospital communities feared loss of payrolls. So did the unions, until a job-protection agreement was reached. The state-run group homes were to take up much of the slack.

The bill that passed the House left the department's plan essentially intact. Some concessions were made to the community, for example, on the location of some of the state group homes. Another change placed five "crisis centers" on the hospital campuses at Cambridge, Fergus Falls,

Moose Lake, Willmar and Faribault.

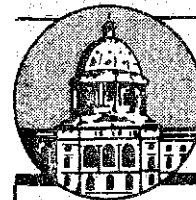
If those four-bed centers are counted, the number of retarded remaining in regional centers by mid-1995 would be 115, not 95.

The Senate version, spearheaded by Brainerd DFLer Don Samuelson, a staunch protector of the Brainerd hospital, is heavy on continued hospital care and light on group homes. It allows for transfers to the community but stretches out the process to the year 2000. The Senate measure would allow 635 people in regional centers by mid-1998 and 425 by 2000.

While the House's version has \$4.1 million to design, build and equip the new state group homes, the Senate's has just \$300,000 for planning. The Senate version would bog down the department's plan for moving residents to more "normal" community settings.

The result, insiders said last week, was legislative hardball. Bruce Nelson, administrator of the House Health and Human Services Committee, said the House bill's promoters decided to "go after Samuelson." They engineered an amendment in an appropriations division to remove the Brainerd center's authority to run programs for the mentally ill and chemically dependent. It also would cancel 80 nursing home beds that an earlier House version would establish at the center.

But House staffers said the amendment was a bargaining chip. House division members passed it "knowing full well that Brainerd would



SESSION  
'89

■ A coalition of child-care advocates asked the governor and top legislative leaders Wednesday not to ignore the needs of children during the final hectic days of the session.

**Details and other legislative coverage on page 11B.**

part of the Faribault campus into Minnesota's fifth prison for men. The Senate bill would cost \$4 million more.

The state Corrections Department proposed last month to take total

**Bills continued on page 11B**

come out of this thing in as good a shape (as it would without the amendment) or better shape," Nelson said.

Mayor Robert Olson held a town meeting Tuesday to protest the bill's aim to "close" the Brainerd center.

Three central figures in the regional center dispute tried to dampen Brainerd's fears. Human Services Commissioner Sandra Gardebring, House Speaker Robert Vanasek, and Rep. Paul Ogren, sponsor of the House bill, spoke at the Capitol to about 50 employees of the Brainerd center.

Said Ogren: "I will not close Brainerd State Hospital." Vanasek predicted Brainerd people will like the bill that will emerge from committee.

The Senate package goes a step farther than the House version in giving relatives a say in decisions to transfer retarded people to the community. The two versions agree to plan the replacement or renovation of psychiatric facilities for the hospitals in Anoka, Moose Lake and Fergus Falls. In addition, both packages call for closing Oak Terrace State Nursing Home in Minnetonka and transferring its patients to regional centers and private facilities.

5/11/89