



Plan for mentally retarded criticized

Meeting hints at obstacles ahead

By **Sam Newlund**
Staff Writer

The Perpich administration's plan to whittle down the size of Minnesota's state hospital system suffered a bashing Wednesday in a meeting organized by a key legislator.

The Department of Human Services was accused of skulduggery and unreliability in recent negotiations aimed at reaching a consensus on the system's future.

Don Samuelson, DFL-Brainerd, chairman of the Senate Finance subdivision on health and human services, told a union spokesman that he had "absolutely no faith" that the department would uphold its end of an agreement to protect union jobs if the department's entire plan isn't approved by the Legislature.

"If they don't get their way, lock stock and barrel, they'll throw your agreement out," Samuelson told union lobbyist Tom Beer.

Charles Schultz, deputy human services commissioner, disagreed with that prediction and denied that the department has been unfair.

The meeting, organized by Samuelson, was the latest evidence that the department's plan for 1,400 mentally retarded people in seven institutions faces a rocky path in the Legislature. Under the plan, all but a few would move to small community homes by mid-1995.

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At the Capitol

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Listeners at yesterday's meeting included former DFL Gov. Wendell Anderson, who was hired by a Willmar community group to lobby for changes in the plan.

Rep. Paul Ogren, chairman of the House Health and Human Services Committee, said the Legislature has "no commitment" to consider bills to implement the department's plan. "We've got a big circular file," he said.

On Tuesday the department announced a job-protection agreement with unions representing employees of eight hospitals, now called regional centers, and two nursing homes. The agreement says it is effective only if the Legislature "substantially authorizes the policy and funding necessary."

Samuelson told Beer to expect the department to renege on its agreement once part of its package is rejected. But Schultz said the department would be bound by any agreement because lawmakers would make it part of any legislation passed.

Hennepin County Commissioner John Derus testified that the department's plan could result in retarded people ending up in dismal single-occupancy rooms where people "eat macaroni and cheese and stare out the window." The County Board has adopted a resolution calling for a moratorium on moving any more retarded people out of institutions.

The state should consider expanded use of state hospitals, not reductions,



Don Samuelson

Derus said. Because money doesn't always follow program shifts into the community, he said, the department's plan ultimately will mean higher property taxes.

Samuelson and Sen. Florian Chmielewski, DFL-Sturgeon Lake, introduced a bill this week calling for a five-year moratorium on moving retarded people out of institutions and for a commission to study care of the retarded.

The Minnesota Congress of Advocates for the Retarded said it will distribute to Gov. Rudy Perpich, legislators and Human Services Commissioner Sandra Gardebring a petition, signed by 12,500 Minnesotans, objecting to the department plan.