

Problems of Handicapped Albany Topic

By KATHLEEN POWERS
Capitol Correspondent

The fifth and last state legislative hearing on the needs of the physically and mentally handicapped was held in Albany last week with handicapped persons, physicians, parents, a nurse, board members of private agencies and others interested in developing new state policies for the handicapped testifying.

Among the recommendations made to Sen. James Donovan, chairman of the Select Committee on Mental and Physical Handicaps, who presided at the hearing, were:

*elimination wherever possible of segregated or special education programs and facilities for the handicapped, and "mainstreaming" children with special needs into their neighborhood public and private schools;

*development of out-patient rather than residential programs for adolescents with emotional problems so that they can maintain close ties with their families and communities;

*better utilization of group homes for adolescents who cannot live with their families and who do not belong in residential institutions;

*encouragement of better transportation systems for the handicapped who are increasingly involving themselves in programs offered outside the home;

*greater cooperation between state and local agencies serving the handicapped so that a unified system might be developed based on individual needs and not on local budgets;

*preschool services and more services for persons past age 21;

*more parental control of programs; and



Dr. Ronald Filippi, a psychiatrist dealing with children, was one of several persons to testify to the State Committee on Physical and Mental Handicaps last week on needed legislation for the handicapped in New York State.

*enforcement of architectural barrier laws and extension of these laws to cover private construction.

Dr. Nicholas G. Alexiou of Albany, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics committee for the handicapped child, told the hearing that his committee urges that handicapped children be treated as normally as possible. In particular, he stressed that handicapped children should be included in regular school programs.

"My committee believes that comprehensive programs for children's educational needs should be provided through the local school districts. We believe it is important to bring handicapped children back into the main stream of school life rather than segregating them," he said.

Rather than develop more segregated programs through BOCES, said Dr. Alexiou, his committee would like to see BOCES programs curtailed in favor of local school district alternatives.

"Fully funded programs for special education should be made available on an integrated basis in the local schools, through local school administrators," he told the committee.

The parent of a deaf child, Fred Mulfelder of the State Parents of Hearing Impaired Children, said that the grouping of children in BOCES programs is unrealistic since there are often only one or two children of the same age who have a related handicap. His daughter attended BOCES instruction until the sixth grade, but then switched to regular classroom instruction. The family has had to pay for a speech teacher for her because speech instruction at school is not adequate, but even so they prefer normal schooling to special schools for the handicapped.

Mulfelder said he would like to see an expansion of itinerant teachers for the handicapped serving several school districts. "My child is entitled to the best education that can be had," he said. "We can't be satisfied with limited support programs. She needs a trained teacher of the deaf five times a week." It may be more profitable to spend money now and make these children self-sufficient than to pay later when they become wards of the state, he said.

New York State should carry all the costs for the schooling of the handicapped beyond the average cost per pupil, said Barbara Dorfman, a representative of the Monroe County Learning Disabilities Association. Her group believes local school districts should have the responsibility of educating handicapped children and that instruction should be in a regular classroom setting when possible.

Elizabeth Peiper, of Schenectady and a member of the Spina Bifida Association of America, told the committee she is sick of having her son, who has spine damage, appeal on telephones for money for his education when the state constitution guarantees a free education to all New Yorkers. She criticized state funding procedures, claiming the education of handicapped

children, like all other children, should come from Education Department and local school district funds. When that money comes from other sources, such as the Department of Mental Hygiene, she said, public attitude is prejudiced against handicapped children.

An Albany psychiatrist, who specializes in child psychiatry, Dr. Ronald Filippi, pleaded for better state services for emotionally disturbed adolescents. He said that in Albany County alone there are between 13 and 18 severely handicapped youngsters who have been refused admission to community facilities because none are equipped to handle their problems.

For example, he explained, if a youth tries to commit suicide while a resident of a facility, he or she is likely to be thrown out. If the youth attempts suicide while applying to a facility, his or her application will likely be turned down. Some youths spend months waiting while their application is referred from one facility to another, only to find that none of them can handle that particular problem.

Dr. Filippi said adolescents rejected by community mental health facilities take the rejection personally. "They are shaped into chronic misfits. Their inability to get help with their mental problems causes the basics of their personality to become chronically arrested. They become dependent on society—either through prison or through welfare."

Both Dr. Filippi and Reynold Levy, director of community relations for the Jewish Board of Guardians of New York City, emphasized that day treatment of disturbed adolescents has not been used extensively enough in New York State.

"Stop funding beds and start funding services," said Levy. He and Dr. Filippi also talked about substitute homes for adolescents and about better training and financial incentives for substitute parents, usually social workers.

Architectural barriers to handicapped persons was the subject of Larry Railey, SUNYA, a project director of the committee on the handicapped, and of Larry Johnson, president of Wheels to Independence, an upstate group of more than 100 physically handicapped persons. Both Railey and Johnson criticized the state law relating to standards that state buildings must conform to for the use of the handicapped. Even with the law, many buildings are inaccessible to blind, deaf, quadriplegic and wheelchair persons.

Railey said that his committee has reviewed United States, Canadian and CUNY standards for the handicapped, and will be publishing a new book of standards for SUNY this spring. He would like to see these new standards supersede all building

CORRECTION

To set the record straight:

Father William M. Hart is pastor of Holy Trinity, Webster. Father Raymond G. Heisel, former pastor, now is pastor of St. Margaret Mary, Irondequoit.

codes and be enforced by a state agency.

Johnson urged a state office for the handicapped that would provide information and referral services. He suggested that tax advantages should be offered to those who provide barrier-free buildings, and that loans, grants and other money should be given to existing public facilities to make them accessible to handicapped persons. He recommended that the State Transportation Department undertake a pilot program to see how public transportation could be made more accessible to the handicapped.

After the hearing, Sen. Donovan said that he was pleased

with the information gathered at the other hearings on the needs of the handicapped this fall.

Other information concerning the needs of the handicapped can be sent to Sen. Donovan at the Legislative Office Building, Albany, N.Y. 12224.

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Hornell Area News Notes

PARISH COUNCIL

Wayland — There was a special council information meeting held recently at St. Joseph's School cafeteria with Father Douglas Hoffman, director of Pastoral Ministry as speaker. Father Hoffman gave an explanation and over-view of the concept of parish councils together with their purposes, objectives and goals.

STUDENTS HONORED

Hornell — Father Robert MacNamara, pastor of St. Ann's extends congratulations on behalf of the parish to the following for achieving high honors on the recent Hornell High School and Arkport honor rolls: Casey Crosby, Rosemary Colomaio, Mike Reardon, Paulette Polasik, Ted Hillman, Lisa Lackey, Mary Mazzella, Paul

Holbrook, Brian Davis, Kevin Diehl, John Colomaio, Eugene Polasik, Elizabeth Racalto, Kathleen Kelleher, Patricia Davis, Diane Lackey, Mary Fran Argenti, Judith Davis, Corinne Munn, Diane Davis, Kathleen Koehler, Kathy Saylor, Darrin Kiker, Leonard Moretti, Ellen Andrus, Mary Ann DiDio, Judy Moretti, Judith Shick and Richard Ciglio.