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Operator Fired From 2 Homes for Mentally Ill

by CLIFFORD J. LEVY New York Times September 9, 2004

The Pataki administration abruptly removed the new operator of a notorious adult home for the mentally ill in Queens yesterday, all but acknowledging that it had failed to examine his record when it put him in charge last month.

The operator, Meyer Weber, was allowed to take over the 125-bed home, Ocean House, in Far Rockaway, even though another home for the mentally ill he runs in Albany had been cited for life-threatening violations in June, and two nursing homes he ran in Connecticut were seized by that state last year after nearly collapsing from financial malfeasance.

The Pataki administration yesterday also barred Mr. Weber from running the Albany home, the 88-bed Pearl of Wisdom. In legal papers, officials offered new evidence of problems at Pearl of Wisdom that called into question why he was installed at Ocean House, and whether the administration had followed through on its pledge to reform the state's adult home system.

Inspectors found that food was in such short supply at Pearl of Wisdom that some residents received no dinner. Twenty-six residents were deprived of psychotropic, cardiac and diabetic medication, some for as long as two weeks, with one missing angina pills for a month. Workers, including supervisors, resigned after not being paid.

The State Health Department, which regulates adult homes, moved against Mr. Weber after The New York Times reported late last month on his appointment at Ocean House.

Robert Kenny, a spokesman for the State Health Department, said Mr. Weber had been removed from the two homes "to protect the health and safety of residents."

"We have placed temporary operators in the respective facilities to ensure that residents are receiving quality services and care," Mr. Kenny said.

Asked whether the department had properly scrutinized Mr. Weber's record before installing him at Ocean House, Mr. Kenny would not comment.

Mr. Weber also declined to comment.

The removal of Mr. Weber means more turmoil for Ocean House, which has become a grim symbol of lax state regulation and poor, even corrupt, private management of the adult homes, which shelter 15,000 mentally ill people in New York.

The State Department of Health installed Mr. Weber in August at Ocean House after the previous operator, Sherman Taub, pleaded guilty to a scheme to steal more than \$2 million from the home.

Mr. Taub, a disgraced lawyer, had been allowed to take over Ocean House by the Pataki administration in the mid-1990's after his brother-in-law, Beryl Zyskind, himself went to prison for diverting millions in revenue from the home for his personal use.

Mr. Weber had been running Ocean House on a temporary basis while his application to become the permanent operator was pending. The new temporary operator is New York Hospital Medical Center of Queens.

The Health Department named the Eddy Inc., an upstate health-care provider, to run Pearl of Wisdom temporarily. In fact, an examination of Mr. Weber's contacts with the Health Department shows that twice since last fall, it let him run adult homes despite his record.

He was allowed by the Health Department to become permanent operator at Pearl of Wisdom last November a month after state officials in Connecticut went to court to seize his two nursing homes, Coleman Park in Bridgeport, which has 123 beds, and Rosewood in Waterbury, which has 84 beds.

In June, a state inspection of Pearl of Wisdom revealed many problems. Still, the department approved Mr. Weber to run Ocean House in August.