

GOVERNOR PATAKI IS SHOCKED

In the spring of 1995, early in his first term, Governor George Pataki pointed out to the press that New York was first among the states in spending for the mentally ill. He did not say it in the spirit of a man who considered this an admirable thing—proof that his state was, at least in this respect, the most civilized in the nation. Instead, he was soliciting support for a plan to reduce the number of beds for the mentally ill, and to cut spending on community programs for them.

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In 1996, a schizophrenic man named Andrew Goldstein began a string of attacks on medical personnel, roommates, and strangers.

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Meanwhile Mr. Pataki was following through by making deep cuts in mental health services, which created huge waiting lists for long-term care and supervised housing. Mr. Goldstein was on many of those lists. He kept trying to get help, and he kept getting turned away. Nor could he check himself into state mental hospitals, although he tried. Mr. Pataki was in the middle of a drive to empty out state hospitals and dump their patients into the programs and facilities whose funding he was cutting back so severely. By then the two major providers of housing for the mentally ill in New York City were the homeless shelters and Rikers Island, the city jail.

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New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and John Cardinal O'Connor personally asked the governor to help finance more beds for the mentally ill. Some 500 protesters held a rally outside City Hall, chanting, "Pataki, where are you?" Mr. Pataki finally agreed to provide about a hundred new beds a year for five years. To put this figure in proportion, about 15,000 mentally ill prisoners a year pass through Rikers Island. Another 3,000 or so of those in homeless shelters are also mentally ill.

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On January 3 of this year, Mr. Goldstein pushed a 32-year-old woman named Kendra Webdale under the wheels of the N train as it pulled into the 23rd Street and Broadway stop.

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On November 9, Mr. Pakati announced that he would stop pushing mentally ill patients out of state hospitals for a whole year. The governor was not only upset by the Goldstein case, but surprised. Here is what he said:

"I will tell you that I am personally shocked when something like this happens. Whenever there is an incident like this, I take a look and think, My goodness, what can we as a people—what can I as a governor—do to protect individuals from themselves and to protect us as a society?"

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Miss Kendale is dead. Mr. Goldstein hopes the courts will eventually send him to a psychiatric hospital rather than to prison for life. Mr. Pataki hopes George W. Bush will sentence him to the Vice Presidency.

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