"Cutbacks will impact tremendously," said Bob Hartman, a staff attorney at the East 2nd Street office. "MFY is the only decentralized legal services corporation in the city. People know about it and come in. We think that's the way to operate, but CALS wants us to dump two offices and centralize.

"If legal services is worth anything at all," he continued, "it's worth it on a storefront basis. A lot of people don't believe that, but I disagree. You get a feel for the neighborhood, the problems on the street. You listen to the same complaints, you see the same faces in court, and you know something is going on. You can't pick that up at Broadway and Worth."

"It might be a new wave, that everyone in legal services will be in big shiny-office buildings and you won't get a feel for what's going on out there. I think the direction things are going in is bad, but under CALS rules they are right and eventually they'll cut us out."

Cathy Mitchell, General Counsel to CALS, has the responsibility for managing the budget day-to-day. She explained some of the problems.

In 1977 Congress set up a funding formula for the Legal Services Corporation, the result of which was the setting of minimum levels below what MFY and other Manhattan programs had already received. So when CALS applied for "access funds" for new programs for the other boroughs to bring them up to minimum levels, the Manhattan programs, funded higher, were not eligible and received nothing.

"MFY is the only program with a deficit at the moment," said Mitchell. "We have taken the position that the MFY board of directors must examine the program, how it looks and runs."

For instance, "other programs don't use social workers, but case handlers who can perhaps take more cases and accomplish the same objectives. I can't say that their higher costs here cover more services.

"It's easy for the program to consider consolidating offices, although that has its problems," she added. "Certainly the community should have input. If no action is taken, then the program will have to be restructured by the CALS board."

Asked about MFY's future, she said, "I see a program that is still relatively helping, but having a lot of difficult questions to