

Break the Roadblock At Willowbrook

Back in March, 1952, the Legislature appropriated \$5,000,000 for the construction of six infirmatory-type buildings at Willowbrook State School.

More than two years have elapsed and blueprints are still being shuffled between interested state departments. It is doubtful that the roadblock will be broken for even one of the six buildings this year.

Meanwhile, admissions to Willowbrook school are being held to an emergency basis because of a lack of facilities.

The public expects its officials to examine matters of this nature with the utmost care so that the state can get the most for its investment and the patients the best possible facilities. But two years appears to be a terribly long time to wait for the officials to make up their minds. Obviously, they should speed up their studies and begin construction at the earliest possible moment.

They should also make clear to the Legislature why the long delay was unavoidable. With funds as limited as they have been for the past few years, it is to be assumed that the Legislature appropriates only what is urgently needed in construction funds. The Willowbrook program apparently was placed in that classification or it would not have won legislative approval.

Won't the Legislature now feel that it was hoodwinked into emergency action? Won't it also view with considerable doubt any new request for emergency funds for Willowbrook?

It is unfair to Willowbrook patients to jeopardize their chances for proper care by procrastination such as appears now to be taking place.

Blueprint Shuffle Stalls \$5,750,000 Project

By ERWIN ENDRESS

The long period of blueprint exchanges between officials of the state Department of Mental Hygiene and Willowbrook State School continued today to delay a start on the \$5,750,000 building program.

Despite hopes last spring for final approval of the program, negotiations would bring about a start in construction this year, new delays have dispelled most hopes in mental hygiene circles that ground would be broken this year for even one of the six

infirmatory-type buildings included in the plans.

Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school, yesterday said departmental officials at Willowbrook, as well as himself, were poring over blueprints for the one building which will most resemble the present infirmatory buildings at Willowbrook.

DR. BERMAN stated that when a state appropriation of \$5,000,000 was approved in March, 1952, at least one building modeled after that provided at Willowbrook was included in the plans.

(Turn to page 14)

ed in the program to speed the work. It is believed that once the building program starts, this latter building will be the first to be constructed.

The Willowbrook official said no information has been given him as to when the Department of Mental Hygiene, which operates Willowbrook, intends to make a start in construction.

Plans now in the hands of Willowbrook officials include few changes which could delay much longer a start in construction, Dr. Berman said.

ADDITIONAL appropriations for enlargement of the Willowbrook laundry and power plant have boosted the total earmarked for the expansion program to \$5,750,000.

Completion of the program would bring into being "the most modern infant care buildings in existence," state officials say, and will boost the patient census at the Island institution by nearly 1,000.

While the delay in construction continued, the Department of Mental Hygiene continued to be hard-pressed for space to care for hundreds of mentally retarded children whom parents wish to place in state child-care institutions.

The present policy is to accept only "hardship cases," officials say.