

Grand Jury to Probe Willowbrook Boy's Death

Conditions at Willowbrook State School—where Friday the second scalding death in three months occurred—will be explored for a grand jury next month, District Attorney John M. Braisted disclosed yesterday.

Braisted launched a formal investigation into 10-year-old John K. Taylor's death as he met with a group of parents whose youngsters are at the institution for the retarded. The parents told the prosecutor that deficiencies at the huge facility can be traced to an inadequate budget.

The severely retarded youngster was fatally burned while being given a shower in the institution. He died last Friday.

The other resident, Frank Harber, 42, died last February.

Braisted said he will begin presenting evidence in connection with the boy's death to the June term of the grand jury. He indicated that the grand jury may be held over until the investigation is completed.

Braisted yesterday interviewed Harber's mother, Mrs. Mary Harber of Brooklyn, but would not comment on what information she provided.

The district attorney said he anticipates a "lengthy" investigation into the child's death. He said the matter was being put over to the June grand jury because the May grand jury will probably have only one more session, next Monday.

The parents told Braisted that

the unrealistic budget is responsible for a situation whereby there are not enough employees to handle the number of residents. Employees are underpaid and this had led to inadequate personnel, they said.

The delegation, members of Willowbrook Chapter, Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, New York State Association for Retarded Children, was led by Mrs. Shirley Epstein of Jamaica, Queens.

Braisted said the delegation made a "great many complaints" about operations at the school extending over a number of years, but its primary purpose was to seek a "thorough and complete investigation."

He said the parents held Dr. Jack Hammond, school director, in high regard.

State School Director Awaits Restoration of Budget Slash

By RAYMOND A. WITTEK

Dr. Jack Hammond director of Willowbrook State School, expressed the hope yesterday that the state Legislature would restore most of \$5 million which it cut from the state Mental Hygiene Department's budget for the fiscal year beginning April 1.

Action on the budget cut may be forthcoming shortly when the Legislature convenes to consider the supplemental budget of the Hygiene Department and other departments, Dr. Hammond said.

The \$5 million cut included about \$2 million that was earmarked for schools for the mentally retarded, Dr. Hammond stated. A "good portion" of the \$2 million would have gone to Willowbrook State School for the hiring of 200 additional employees, he added.

Dr. Hammond agreed with critics of the admittedly overcrowded school who claimed it was understaffed, but he placed the blame for the situation largely on the shoulders of the Legislature for failing to appropriate the necessary funds to hire sufficient personnel.

Even if the Legislature should approve the supplemental budget and the school was to hire 200 more employees, the number would still fall far short of the 440 additional employees he originally requested, Dr. Hammond said.

The doctor said Willowbrook State School will operate on a budget of \$13 million for the present fiscal year. The school has 2,200 employees who care for 3,054 patients.

WHEN QUESTIONED about pay being a factor in failing to

attract prospective employees to the school, Dr. Hammond pointed out that the Legislature voted pay raises for the most of the school's employees.

He noted that new attendants, for example, with a minimum education, receive \$3,915 a year to start and may earn over \$5,000 after 10 years. In addition, he said, there are promotional opportunities at higher wages available to them.

Dr. Hammond hit back at recent criticism of some of the school's personnel.

"The vast majority of our employees have worked here for many years," he said. "They are stable, dependable people

who care very much for the welfare of the patients."

Dr. Hammond was questioned after he conferred for two hours yesterday with District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr. The district attorney is conducting an investigation into the death of a 10-year-old mentally retarded boy at the school last Friday. The boy was fatally scalded while being given a shower.