

RFK Is Shocked at 2 Retarded Schools

By WILLIAM H. RUDY and HENRY BECKETT

Sen. Kennedy today presented a shocking picture of conditions in two of New York State's institutions for the mentally retarded and declared they were intolerable.

Kennedy appeared before the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental Retardation at the Concourse Plaza Hotel in The Bronx. He told of his recent visits to the state school at Rome and the Willowbrook, on Staten Island.

"I was shocked and saddened by what I saw there," he said. "There are young children slipping into blankness and life-long dependence. There are crippled children without adequate medical attention or rehabilitative therapy. There are retarded children living in the midst of severely disturbed adults.

"And there are many—far too many—living in filth and dirt, their clothing in rags, in rooms less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo, without adequate supervision or a bit of affection, condemned to a life without hope."

"Nobody who has ever raised a child would want him to live for a moment as thousands of the mentally retarded now live in New York," Kennedy said.

Wards built for 40 are crowded with 80 or more, he said, and some 19th-century wards built for 80 hold nearly twice that number.

"Patients in Willowbrook must walk on other patients' beds to get to their own," he said. "There is, of course, no room in such a ward for personal possessions, for any shred of individuality, for a toy, or some clothing, or a book . . .

"And what do they do during the day? Many just rock back and forth. They grunt and gibber and soil themselves. They take off their clothes.

"But, for the most part, they sit—too often in dimness and gloom and idleness and stench, staring at the wall or an attendant or an occasional strange visitor."

Kennedy emphasized the understaffing of the institutions. Willowbrook, he said, has seven recreation workers where 52 are needed, and has not a single certified pediatrician.

One of the Senator's older sisters, Rosemary, is mentally retarded and for years has been in a private institution in Wisconsin. Outside the hearing, when asked for added comment on his testimony, Kennedy told reporters:

"I wouldn't want any child or any relative of mine to pass one hour in these institutions."