

Retarded Children in 'Snake Pits,' Kennedy Says

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D., N. Y.) charged today that retarded children at two New York state institutions are being kept in virtual snake-pit conditions "in rooms less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo."

Kennedy said that at one of the institutions—the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island — five patients

died unnatural deaths in the past year as a result of "overcrowding and inadequate staffing."

"One patient was burned in a shower by another retarded patient," said Kennedy. "Another boy, a low-functioning retardate, was killed by an older, more capable boy who was put in with the slower boys as punishment."

At both Willowbrook and a state school at Rome, N. Y., Kennedy told a state legislative committee on men-

tal retardation in the Bronx filthy and intolerable conditions were condemning children "to life without hope."

Kennedy said he visited both schools last week and found "young children slipping into blindness and life-long dependence . . . (and) crippled children without adequate medical attention or rehabilitative therapy."

Children at Willowbrook, which Kennedy said had not a single staff pediatrician, are given "great doses of tran-

quillizers" to keep them quiet and in a state of "dimness and gloom and idleness and stench, staring at the wall or at an occasional strange visitor."

Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook's director, was not available for immediate comment. Dr. Charles Greenberg, director at the Rome institution, conceded that overcrowding was a major problem but said that the institution planned to transfer patients.