

# Snakepit for Kids—State Was Warned

## 'Snakepit' for Kids: State Was Warned

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A "devastating" report detailing the "snakepit" conditions in New York State schools for the retarded was handed over to Gov. Rockefeller ten months ago, it was revealed today.

The frightful picture of retarded children living worse than "animals in a zoo" which was painted yesterday by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was not news to those who had seen the report.

Sen. Kennedy's charge that children in State schools are "condemned to a life without hope," said the denunciation was "not a complete surprise" to him.

State Sen. Harry Kraf (D-Bronx), whose committee heard

Sen. Kraf, chairman of the

## Urge Rocky Release Data On Children's 'Snakepit'

SHAKEPIT from First Page

Joint Legislative Committee on retardation and physical handicap, said he received a copy of the report last July when he took over as chairman of the committee from Sen. William T. Conklin (R.-Bklyn.).

Sen. Conklin had appointed three women to visit State Schools and draw up a report on what they found. Sen. Conklin later turned the report over to the Governor, but it has never been made public.

However, one of the women on the Conklin committee, Mrs. Helen Kerner of 571 Ovington ave., Brooklyn, told The Journal-American today:

"Sen. Kennedy's statements are 100 per cent correct. The conditions mentioned by him are the same now as I found one year ago."

Sen. Kraf immediately sent Sen. Max B. Berking (D.-Westchester) and Assemblyman James J. Barry (D.-Syracuse), to investigate conditions at the Willowbrook State School for the Retarded on Staten Island, one of those visited by Sen. Kennedy.

### ANOTHER UNIT

The Staten Island institution also cares for 208 children and infants, all under six years of age, at the old, city-abandoned Gouverneur Hospital, 621 Water st., on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook director, said \$1-million was spent to rehabilitate the five-story, red-brick structure which is leased on a year-to-year basis from the city.

The Gouverneur quarters, he said, has a staff of 192, including five physicians, one of whom is on duty round-the-clock.

Also, Dr. Hammond said, Gouverneur spends \$4,980.70 per patient each year for care, compared to a state average of less than \$2,000.

Sen. Kennedy's report to the committee hearing, in the Concourse Plaza Hotel, Bronx, stated he witnessed on his personal inspection tour young children "slipping into blank-

ness and life-long dependence."

"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..."

Sen. Kennedy told the committee he had visited both Willowbrook and the State School at Rome, N. Y.

Both Sen. Kennedy and State Sen. Kraf called for release of the report on State Schools by Gov. Rockefeller.

The report and the charges brought by Sen. Kennedy were noted in a telegram sent to Gov. Rockefeller by Al Wurf, executive director of the New York State Employees Council 50. AFL-CIO, who demanded for "an immediate crash program."

Mr. Wurf told the Governor conditions at the State institutions "are matters we have been bringing to your subordinates' attention for years, since unfortunately, you've been too busy to meet with Council 50 representatives."

He demanded the speedy program to "increase the staff by one-third in all schools for the retarded, and another crash program to obtain equipment needed."

In Albany, the office of Acting State Mental Hygiene Commr. Christopher J. Terrence commented that the department and Gov. Rockefeller had "long been aware of the difficulties faced by State schools as a result of overcrowding and under-staffing."