

Editorials

# Don't Blame Willowbrook

We agree with Sen. Robert F. Kennedy whose charges about conditions at Willowbrook State School and a similar institution in upstate Rome have set off a furor about the way the state cares for its mentally retarded charges.

And we agree also with Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, who says that with the facilities they have, the dedicated professional people and employes at the undermanned institution are doing their very best for the unfortunate humans in their care.

We wish, however, that Sen. Kennedy had pointed his finger where the blame lies—at Albany. And at Washington.

It has been lack of funds, not lack of purpose and effort on the part of the staff, that has caused a good many of the conditions which shocked the senator. Because present salaries don't compensate for the unpleasantness associated with much of the work at Willowbrook, there has been a chronic shortage of help. Yet many disinterested observers have stated that the staff has accomplished wonders within its limitations.

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WILLOWBROOK was a first giant step into a vast field of public care for the disabled, one that many other states have yet to match. It has accomplished much, and has earned praise from many authorities.

There is heartbreak even for the dedicated in the knowledge that many of the patients will never improve, will never be able to perform many of the functions that normal toddlers can, even if they live to old age. Society—especially if it is truly to be the Great Society President Johnson proposes—must provide both care and compassion for them in maximum degree. If Albany can't foot the entire bill, Washington must come to its aid.

Even more regrettable is the thought that because funds, help and facilities are inadequate, some of Willowbrook's patients who might be restored to some degree of usefulness and functions in society are missing the training they require.

Sad, too, is the fact that since last October Willowbrook has closed its doors to all new admissions because it is so overcrowded. Where are the new cases getting the care they need?

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SEN. KENNEDY and his family have a personal interest in the mentally retarded, and their interest has done much to spark better efforts by both private and governmental agencies in behalf of these unfortunates.

The senator's criticisms can only achieve good if he follows them up with a campaign to get federal aid to abet the state's efforts for the retarded. And if he alerts Albany to do far more and spend far more than it has already.

It is healthy and humane to air problems society once kept shut up in the closet. We feel that Dr. Hammond and all the staff at Willowbrook will find that these complaints will help them and their charges.

We all must realize it is our obligation to provide total social security for the socially unadaptable.