

Willowbrook Jury to Hear RFK

A Staten Island grand jury investigating three deaths since February at Willowbrook State School—the largest institution for the mentally retarded in the country—meets tomorrow.

Sen. Kennedy, whose reports about what he called "intolerable" and "zoo-like" conditions at Willowbrook and Rome State School produced shock waves, has been invited to testify by District Attorney Braisted.

Kennedy today offered to cooperate with Gov. Rockefeller "in any and every way" to bring improved conditions.

He made the statement in response to Rockefeller's assertion that mentally retarded children "are getting better care and greater personal attention from better trained people than ever before, all throughout the state."

Rockefeller added, however, that "we still have a long way to go." The Governor's comments came during a visit to Craig Colony School at Sonyea, in upstate Livingston County.

Apprised of Rockefeller's remarks, Kennedy said: "Without looking to the past I would agree with Governor Rockefeller that a great deal needs to be done by all of us."

Meanwhile, Rockefeller today made public a telegram from the State Assn. for Retarded Children urging him to ignore newspaper criticism of the Gouverneur Hospital children's unit here. "It is one of the bright spots of institutional care of the severely retarded," the group said.

Braisted said he hoped Kennedy had something "material to contribute" to the Willowbrook grand jury hearing.

Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook director, said Kennedy breezed through the place and did not stay long enough to grasp the problems in proper context.

Hammond conceded that, although there were exaggerations, the Senator's assertions were basically true. He also said they were the very problems that he has been contending with since he took over a little more than a year ago.

Hammond said he had curtailed admission and that the population had edged downward from 6,400 to 5,900. But, with a rated capacity of 4,500, the school still remains overcrowded.

In citing Willowbrook's special problems, the 49-year-old psychiatrist stressed the need for more staff in all areas and the difficulty in filling available jobs.

One ward Kennedy visited was where a patient killed another with a blow on the neck in

July. Two attendants—one a woman—were on duty at the time, the usual night shift.

A minimum of four attendants is needed at all times,

Hammond said, especially in view of the overcrowding and the type of patients.

At the time of the slaying, the ward had 77 patients—nearly double the intended capacity.