

Senator Kennedy Joins Willowbrook Parents

BECAUSE of his position as a United States Senator, Robert F. Kennedy was able to impress upon the conscience of the community all of the abuses in the care of the mentally retarded which the Benevolent Society For Retarded Children, The Parents Organization of Willowbrook State School, has been attempting to have the Department of Mental Hygiene correct for 16 long, hard years.

FOR THE last ten years, we have met annually with the Commissioner of Mental Hygiene, various members of his staff and directors of the state schools for the mentally retarded. At every one of those meetings the very conditions enumerated by Senator Kennedy, in his testimony before the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Mental Retardation and Physical Handicap on Sept. 9, 1965, were pointed out by the parent representatives of our organization. We were told that we were unrealistic, too demanding and too emotionally involved. Strange to relate, not only Senator Kennedy, but the most recent report to the Governor, by the New York State Planning Committee on Mental Disorders (mental retardation section of vol. 1) substantiates every claim we have made concerning the inadequacies, overcrowding, lack of trained personnel and programs in the state schools for the mentally retarded, revealing the total lack of proper planning and total bankruptcy in regard to the retarded.

THE CURRENT furor places Dr. Jack Hammond, Director of Willowbrook State School for a little over a year, in what appears to be a position of some responsibility for the creation of these conditions. The contrary is true. The conditions did not happen overnight, nor in the last year, but have been allowed to exist and intensify and multiply over the years. Upon assuming the directorship, Dr. Hammond took courageous steps to rectify the deplorable con-

conditions did not happen overnight, nor in the last year, but have been allowed to exist and intensify and multiply over the years. Upon assuming the directorship, Dr. Hammond took courageous steps to rectify the deplorable conditions he found there. Despite his efforts, and those of the dedicated personnel under him, the prevailing public attitude toward mental retardation, of misunderstanding, indifference and apathy has resulted in a similar attitude on the part of the appropriate state officials and legislators charged with the financing and administration of these institutions.

WE, THE parents of these children, once more demand:

1. Adequate staffing in all areas
2. Realistic salary scales, since present salaries are too low to attract enough qualified personnel.
3. Relief of overcrowding of buildings and wards by exploration of existing idle facilities and immediate construction of new buildings.
4. Sufficient educational, recreational and rehabilitative facilities and programs.
5. The establishment of a separate department concerned only with the needs of the retarded, and divorced from the Department of Mental Hygiene.
6. Release of presently available funds to immediately implement the foregoing.

WE PARENTS have raised and spent a half million dollars during the past 16 years in an attempt to make the lives of all retarded children at Willowbrook a little fuller and more meaningful. We cannot, however, despite such expenditures, secure for these, our most defenseless citizens, the basic decencies which are the right of every human being.

ONCE MORE, we offer the Governor all our aid and cooperation in obtaining a better life for the children in Willowbrook State School and other state schools for the retarded.

OUR THANKS to Senator Robert F. Kennedy for joining us in our efforts to gain for all institutionalized retarded their right to live in dignity and safety.

**THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
FOR RETARDED CHILDREN—
WILLOWBROOK CHAPTER of the
NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION
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New York

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