

Willowbrook Defended by Parents' Unit

The head of the parents' organization of Willowbrook State School yesterday attacked renewed censure by State Sen. Seymour Thaler of the hepatitis research-immunization program at the institution.

Sen. Thaler Monday night charged that patients are admitted to the institution for the mentally retarded only if their parents or guardians agree to their participation in the research program.

Said Mrs. Israel Epstein of Queens: "I know of parents who would not agree to participation in the research project and whose children were admitted to Willowbrook."

Thaler's charge was made during an interview on TV Channel 13's Newsfront program.

The matter of admissions was discussed at the end of the interview in a pretaped statement by Dr. Alan D. Miller, state commissioner of mental hygiene.

Dr. Miller said, "Only if the parents clearly understand the project and sign a letter of consent is the child taken into the special (research) unit. If they prefer not to do this, the child is admitted to a regular unit as soon as we have room."

Mrs. Epstein said during the 14 years she has been on the board of the Parents' Benevolent Society for Retarded Children she has never received a complaint from a parent about the research project.

"Parents have said they are proud their children can contribute to research," she said.

She said the parents' group sent a telegram of support to Dr. Saul Krugman, New York University pediatrician in charge of the project. She said if the group had felt Sen. Thaler had substantial proof to back his accusations, it would have supported him.

Last month the Queens Democrat charged that children at Willowbrook were given injections of hepatitis virus for clinical research without their parents' permission.

The accusation was quickly denied by Dr. Jack Hammond, school director. Dr. Hammond could not be reached for comment on the renewed charges.