

Job discrimination charge denied by Willowbrook School director

A decision to petition the state Human Rights Commission to investigate possible discriminatory practices at Willowbrook State School was made yesterday by Alfred Wurt, executive director of Council 50 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO.

Charges of discrimination in the promotion, dismissal and treatment of employes at the institution were made by Wurt after a morning meeting with union officials of Local 1148. Wurt also stated that understaffing was creating "dangerous situations" for patients.

Local 1148 of Council 50 represents about 725 employes at Willowbrook, out of 2,600. The official bargaining agency for its employes, as well as the em-

ployes of other state institutions, is the Civil Service Employees Association.

The majority of Willowbrook employes are Negro, but only a few Negroes are found in higher job categories, according to union organizer Lee Hood. Most Negroes, he said, work as attendants on ward service. Wurt and Hood cited cases of Negro employes whom they said had been discriminated against in promotions to supervisory positions. The use of "provisional" and "temporary" job classifications, Wurt said, allows administrators at Willowbrook to keep unqualified whites in top positions.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the institution, commenting later on the statements, insisted that all employment practices must be in accordance with civil service law.

He stressed that before an employe gets on the state payroll, his appointment must be approved by the Civil Service Department.

Pointing out that the school employs Negro nurses and supervisors, he acknowledged that there was "an absence of qualified (Negro) applicants for supervisory positions."

Wurt said his concern was directed not only toward employes of Willowbrook, but also toward its patients. Understaffing, he said, meant that one attendant must take care of a large number of patients, and because of this, patient care suffers.

A case of one woman attendant caring for 86 ward patients was cited. Wurt contends that "between 500 and 600 vacancies" for attendants exist at Willowbrook. Dr. Hammond places the fig-

ure nearer 300, asserting that Willowbrook is not any more understaffed than similar institutions. He pointed to an allowance for 600 new positions to be created as the reason for the high figure, noting that usually it remains about 90 or 100.

He did concede that a "job freeze" since May 13, when the department's budget was cut by the Legislature, has prohibited him hiring new personnel.

The director acknowledged that Willowbrook is "understaffed and overcrowded" and that its staff is overworked. "But he emphasized that these conditions are present at all state institutions and that action is being taken to correct them. As examples, he cited cooperation with the Career Development program and the Office of Economic Opportunity to fill existing vacancies.

Other union leader offers positive note

A "commitment to being part of a developmental program" to benefit both employes and patients at Willowbrook State School was noted yesterday afternoon by Theodore C. Wenzl, president of the statewide Civil Service Employees Association.

Wenzl met with Willowbrook officials for the first time since the CSEA was recognized as the official bargaining agent for state employes in January.

The CSEA, with 160,000 members on the state level, has 1,600 Willowbrook employes out of a total 2,600, on its membership list.

Wenzl announced that a field representative, William Goring, will begin working at Willowbrook next week, in an attempt to improve the agency's services to its members.

It is now thought that the two unions will be in the running when proposed elections are held in the fall to determine which union will represent Willowbrook and other state institution employes.

The CSEA was appointed by Gov. Rockefeller as the official bargaining agent, but was never voted upon by the employes.