

Letters to the Editor

'Saving' on Mental Hygiene

To the Editor:

On April 19, the present administration of New York State announced that economics demanded the layoff of personnel. Of the 8,250 people who would be laid off, 2,800 would be taken from the Department of Mental Hygiene.

This department has a very special kind of human being in its care. Of all the functions of government, the welfare of people who are so dependent should be of top-ranking importance. Yet approximately one-third of the lay-off hit this one already understaffed department, under the guise of economic necessity.

Such a move is both morally indefensible and economically unsound. As an example, let us take one research unit at the Willowbrook State School, the largest school for the mentally retarded in the world. Patients brought to the research unit are examined by a psychologist, geneticist, physician and endocrinologists. After evaluation, special treatments are provided. The groundwork for some of

these have been developed within this unit.

Of the 92 patients investigated so far, 42 have been placed in the community. This is not just sending the patients home. It is sending them out to live productive lives.

It is both morally and economically pressing that such work be continued. It now saves the State of New York \$73,000 a year in custodial care for these patients. Related services to the school and community save the state \$88,000 per year.

Thus, while the unit costs the state about \$265,000 a year to maintain, the unit is saving the state \$161,000 a year and its work now could readily be expanded. However, the promising lines of research which have resulted in these savings, human and economic, are suddenly terminated.

New approaches on the basis of these findings cannot be explored. For both parent and child, it is the fountainheads of hope that have been diminished.

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