

# Board visits Willowbrook 2 hours a month

By JANE KURTIN

Once a month for two hours, the self-styled "eyes and ears" of the governor get together to inspect and discuss conditions at Willowbrook State School.

The Board of Visitors is currently comprised of six persons, each appointed by Gov. Rockefeller to prepare a joint report on the needs of the institution.

During this week, reader response to disclosures of the situation at Willowbrook appearing in the Advance has made it obvious that the public has generally not been aware of the desperate needs of the state school.

Lee Landes, board chairman and public relations director at Staten Island Community College describes the Board of Visitors as "active" and "effective" and cites an instance

in 1967 in which clothing and staff personnel were provided and buildings repaired as a result of a request made by the board.

Landes explained that the board "has no administrative functions or responsibilities" to Willowbrook.

While he claims that the "legislators on Staten Island have been most cooperative," Landes recalled that the board has not met with Assemblyman Lucio F. Russo or State Sen. John J. Marchi in six years, or with Assemblyman Edward J. Amann in two years.

"And frankly," Landes said, "I don't know what purpose such a meeting would serve. Legislators are not directly responsible to local institutions."

James E. Hannon, a Manhattan attorney and eight-year

member of the board, cited the difficulty in bringing problems of Willowbrook to the public's attention.

"I don't know how you could bring these problems to light," Hannon said. "What are you supposed to do? Hand out leaflets and put advertisements in the newspaper?"

Praising Dr. Jack Hammond, administrator of Willowbrook, as "a great improvement over the previous director" and "a sincere and dedicated man," Hannon claimed that Dr. Hammond does the best that can be done with the budget from Albany.

Referring to the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's 1965 visit to Willowbrook as "unfair" and creating "a tempest in a teacup," Hannon suggested that "you have to come down to Willowbrook to get the full story of what is being done here."

Mrs. Mary Ellis, wife of Civil Court Justice Jerome O. Ellis, replaced her husband as a board member upon his appointment to the bench.

Although she admits that the board "does not always get good results," Mrs. Ellis explained that "at least the reports we prepare on Willowbrook bring certain situations to the attention of the governor."

While Landes periodically makes trips to Albany to meet with other chairmen of Boards of Visitors, Mrs. Ellis said that "in the nine years that I've been on the board, the entire group has never gone to Albany."

"But I think the governor listens to what we have to say," Mrs. Ellis reported. "We are his liaison between the government and the institution."

C. Edward Gideon, a resident of Valley Stream, L.I., who works on Staten Island, was first appointed to the board in 1950 by Gov. Thomas E. Dewey and later reappointed by Rockefeller.

Gideon, who shares Hannon's feeling that "Kennedy stirred up a lot of trouble," praised Island legislators for "fighting like the dickens" for Willowbrook.

Although he could not remember exactly when he had met with any of this borough's three lawmakers, Gideon said it "is not necessary for them to visit the institution because they know what's going on from letters and telegrams which we send them."

Asked what he does to familiarize citizens with the needs of Willowbrook State School, Gideon replied that he "does not meet with parents but will speak to groups" when he is invited.

Two other members of the Board of Visitors, Carlton H. Ettlinger of Staten Island and Joseph T. Weingold of Manhattan, could not be reached for comment on their roles with the board.