

State probe ordered for Willowbrook

By JANE KURKIN

into the problems of Willowbrook State School will be launched some time this week at the request of Assemblyman Edward J. Amann.

Amann, who claimed he first became aware of the critical condition of the institution through Advance articles, said the investigation will be headed by Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the State Mental Hygiene Department.

Grunberg described the upcoming investigation as "a re-evaluation of Willowbrook to establish areas of critical need."

Amann, a member of the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental and Physical Handicap, said he was aware that Willowbrook had a staff shortage but had no idea of the "gravity of the situation."

Amann accounted for his failure to visit the institution in two years or to inspect it for six years by saying he has never been invited there by the director.

Amann said he met with employees and Dr. Jack Hammond, who has been called on to let me know directly that there was a severe problem at Willowbrook."

Explaining that he is not responsible for administering Willowbrook, Amann said

does depend on the actions of the State of Illinois which points out certain things but didn't make the situation critical.

"I feel that I should have been advised of the crisis at Willowbrook by Dr. Hammond, who could have used the simple method of telephoning me."

"I didn't find out that there was anything alarming at Willowbrook, until I saw the paper," Amann said.

Assemblyman Lucio F. Russo, who vigorously denied Mental Hygiene Commissioner Alan D. Miller's claim that legislators were "killing patients" by denying funds for state institutions, maintains that "areas of public health" have first priority with him.

Speaking of Miller's plea for money, Russo said, "I don't blame anyone for trying to take care of their own House Commissioners' bills."

Russo said he and other legislators had been informed that the Mental Hygiene Department had "gross areas of waste and duplication" by "experts on the Ways and Means Committee."

"We are moving into a new era," Russo continued, "where people are demanding cut budgets and lower taxes, even if it means fewer services."

"I represent the taxpayers," he said, "and I don't want to see them pay more taxes than they have to pay."

legislators were murdering patients by not voting for an expanded budget was not only attacked by me but by many of the other legislators. And if Dr. Hammond felt that we should visit Willowbrook, why didn't he call and invite us? I am willing to go there at his convenience," Russo added.

"People should realize that you can't have your cake and eat it. If you don't vote for taxes, you can't expect more services."

State Sen. John J. Marchi did vote for "every single tax," he said, "but would have voted for more if it meant maintaining health services."

Marchi, who has said he supported taxes, "even though he represents an area where taxes are not popular," said he "cannot do it alone."

"What I'm afraid of," Marchi said, "is that the choices we'll have in the future will be worse, unless we have some kind of reform on a federal level."

"The children we're talking about aren't criminals or dope pushers, and they deserve to be helped. I don't think people really realize what they are voting against when they kill certain taxes. Unless they have a personal involvement," Marchi concluded, "I don't think they're aware of the critical and important nature of what we're talking about."