

# We Must Insure Kids' Rights, Panel Pleads

By GENE SPAGNOLI

Creation of a child advocacy system as the best means of safeguarding the rights of the state's children was urged yesterday by the State Committee for Children.

"Our committee has found, after studying the range of children's services, a large gap between services offered and services delivered," declared Mrs. Kathleen Lukens, a committee official, in a report to Gov. Rockefeller. "While New York is among the leaders in child care, much remains to be done to pull together the many benefits now available to children.

"We have to eliminate the red tape and bureaucratic bewilderment that often deprives a child of his benefits, and we have to provide those needed services that are not now available," Mrs. Lukens said.

The 100-member committee, composed of parents,

professionals and persons active in the field of children's services, was formed in November 1970 by the governor on the recommendation of Dr. Alan Miller, Commissioner of Mental Hygiene.

Under the proposal, the Legislature would create a child advocacy commission. It would review budgets and programs of agencies dealing with children and make recommendations for improved services.

It would pay particular heed to the efficiency of interagency relationships and try to close any service gaps that leave the child without the help he needs.

The commission would encourage the establishment of local advocacy councils that would direct children to proper agencies in the community for aid and investigate complaints about inadequate services.

Any cases the local advocates could not resolve would be sent to the commission.

The committee recommended an appropriation of \$959,000 for operating expenses for the year.

"In proposing the child advocacy system, the committee is not unmindful of the fiscal difficulty the state now finds itself in," said Mrs. Lukens.

But, she added, the committee "feels that far more effective use of the funds now available can be made with child advocates keeping an eye on programs for children and seeing that the services are not lost in a bureaucratic wasteland."

During a discussion with committee members, Rockefeller took an opportunity to illustrate just how serious is the fiscal crisis.

When Mrs. Shirley Epstein described the situation at the Willowbrook School in Staten Island as so bad because of staff shortages that some of the mentally retarded youngsters were not being fed properly and asked him what he could do, he said:

"I don't honestly know how to meet the situation. One of the alternatives is to close some institutions and send the children back to their parents."