

Editorial

Don't delay the remedy

That "immediate" investigation of conditions at Willowbrook State School that was promised two weeks ago hasn't been really immediate after all. And the way things are shaping up, it doesn't seem to be the kind of investigation that's really needed to put an end to the intolerable conditions under which so many of Willowbrook's retarded charges have been living.

It seems ridiculous for the state Department of Mental Hygiene to be making the investigation anyhow. The department has been running Willowbrook all these years, so if there are deficiencies in operation and proper staffing, they're the department's fault, not the fault of the many dedicated people who are employed at the facility, and who do much more for the handicapped residents there than the average attendant, nurse, doctor or instructor might be expected to do.

The State Legislature should start the investigating, and do it quickly. Staten Island's Assemblyman Edward J. Amann has indicated that he'll wait for a departmental reevaluation of what's needed at Willowbrook. We don't think that's the route to a remedy.

He and the Island's other two legislators, Sen. John J. Marchi and Assemblyman Lucio F. Russo, even without any report from anybody, know what the trouble is — the state government, and that includes the Legislature, has slashed the Mental Hygiene budget far beyond what's required for adequate care by adequate personnel.

As several readers have pointed out, construction of that big billion-dollar Albany mall is still going forward. It will be a monumental complex of offices for state functions, but it may also be a monument to callous disregard of the things which should come first. Legislators have recently fattened their own salaries and expense allotments, and have also provided some unusual pension benefits for themselves and other officials.

In fact, a realistic investigation committee should include not only legislators, but representatives of the families of the residents of Willowbrook, representatives of the staff and representatives of the general public, some of whom should be Staten Islanders.

We've had similar probes of other matters that actually matter less than finding out how to put an end to man's inhumanity to man.