

Amann rejects hearing on school

Assemblyman Edward J. Amman has rejected a request by Assemblyman Andrew Stein of Manhattan to convene a legislative hearing, "with subpoena power," on the "deteriorating health situation at Willowbrook State School."

Amman, who is chairman of the Special Legislative Task Force on Health, said "there is absolutely no need for a hearing because the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene is fully aware of the critical nature of the situation at Willowbrook."

"It does not serve Assemblyman Stein well," Amman

said, "to cry about the budget now, because he and the entire Democratic delegation of the Assembly voted for the budget as it stands.

"Calling a hearing now would be just another grandstand play. But, if Assemblyman Stein could tell me how to raise money by holding such a hearing, I'd hold hearings every day.

"The only solution," Amman added, "is a lift of the job freeze. Assemblyman Stein will have the opportunity to raise additional money for this next week at the special session of the Legislature."

Stein, who toured Willowbrook Monday with one other member of a five-man task force appointed by Democratic Minority Leader Stanely Steingut, said that "the conditions at Willowbrook demand a full hearing. With the lives of children at stake, we cannot afford to wait until the Legislature convenes."

"Willowbrook," Stein continued, "serves the City of New York, and Assemblyman Amman's committee should be vitally concerned with the situation there."

Shocked by the result of a

25 per cent reduction in staff at Willowbrook since the job freeze went into effect. Stein expressed the hope that his task force "will find an alternative

to the present freeze, which particularly affects the patients in New York's large mental institutions."

Informed that in wards where there are sometimes two attendants for 60 profoundly retarded patients and that feeding of helpless patients is limited to about four minutes each, Stein commented:

"When you are faced with financial belt-tightening, you cut out the frills but you don't stop feeding the children. I'm afraid that this policy of job attrition (where workers who leave are not replaced) is the worst possible approach to budget cuts. It makes no rational sense."

Although he cannot see the purpose of a special hearing such as Stein suggests, Dr. Jack

Hammond, director of the institution, is willing to go along with the procedure if it materializes.

"Certainly," Dr. Hammond said, "I have no objection to any kind of hearings which investigate our needs. I hope that all the attempts being made to bring public attention to our needs will be helpful.

"But," continued Dr. Hammond, "I have to think realistically in terms of this state's fiscal condition. I'm sure that everybody wants to help; but as I have said many times before, everything hinges ultimately on how much tax money is made available for this kind of institution and the taxpayers' willingness to see money used for this, rather than other purposes."