

# Seek Willowbrook death probe

## Group asks D.A. to check on neglect

The Federation of Parents Organizations for the State Mental Institutions will demand that District Attorney John M. Braisted convene a grand jury investigation into the deaths of children at Willowbrook State School caused by "lack of good treatment or neglect."

Indicating at a Manhattan news conference yesterday that similar demands will be made throughout New York State where other institutions are located, Max Schneier, chairman of the federation, referred to an admission by Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, that three or four deaths each month are attributable to a child's choking on his food.

"We are demanding," Schneier explained, "that district attorneys in each county where there is a state institution, investigate the deaths of these children and fix the responsibility for them no matter how high up the responsibility goes."

"The legal staff of the federation," Schneier explained, "is preparing suit in the United States District Court and the United States Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., to ensure the rights of all patients in state institutions."

Mrs. Helen Kaplan, chairman of the Nassau County chapter of the New York State Association for Retarded Children, charged that there has been a 300 per cent increase in deaths at Willowbrook within

the last year due to lack of adequate cars.

"The New York State Department of Mental Hygiene," Schneier said, "claims that the death rate at the institution is the same this year as last year."

"We are not accepting the department's figures," Schneier explained, "because they do not offer a breakdown of causes of death which are natural and those which are the result of neglect."

Harold Wolfe, a spokesman for the state Department of Mental Hygiene, said that it would take at least \$105 million, in addition to this year's existing budget, to provide adequate care for the mentally retarded.

Schneier announced the federation is launching a "massive letter-writing campaign" to have taxpayers let the legislators know that they are willing to accept additional "equitable taxes which are earmarked to provide humane services for the patients in New York's state institutions."

"We are also asking," Schneier continued, "that the clergy, who have until now not been heard from on the issue of patient care in the institutions, inform their parishioners of the dire need for tax dollars to save patients in the state schools and institutions."