

# SUNDAY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER®

New York, N.Y. 10017, Sunday, January 16, 1972

## Stein Demands Subpenas In Probe of Willowbrook

By FRANK McKEOWN

Assemblyman Andrew Stein, (D-L Manhattan) whose charges have rocked Willowbrook State School, will go to Albany this week to seek subpena power from the Legislature for the newly-formed Richmond chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

If for some reason the Legislature should withhold the power to call witnesses into the probe of alleged abuses at the state facility, Stein said similar powers can be granted to the citizens' group by the City Council.

The Council's authority over the state institution stems from the fact that some city funds are used to support the Staten Island school.

"We must have an independent citizens' group conduct an investigation of the conditions at the school to prevent the issue from being considered simply a political gimmick," Stein said.

Stein has visited the state institution for the mentally retarded four times and called the conditions there "barbaric."

"The place is a hellhole, a pit, a medieval torture chamber," Stein said as he called for a takeover of the state institution by the federal government. "The conditions there are a horror, the most depressing sights I have ever seen."

Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-C., Bronx) spent part of last Thursday taking a tour of Willowbrook and investigating conditions at the school.

Stein said that because of the lack of funds in the state budget the state school is undermanned by about 1,000 employees. "Because of the shortage, the retardates are allowed only about four minutes of an attendant's time to feed each of them," Stein said.

He added there should be at least one attendant for every four residents, but there is only one attendant for every 30 to 40.

"Because the children can't be properly fed, they are forced to gulp down their food," Stein charged. "Some of them choke."

The assemblyman contended there were four deaths at the institution last month alone.

Stein said he is going to contact Richmond District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr. this week to demand a grand jury investigation into the "deplorable" conditions at the school.

The DA had a grand jury look into the problems at the school in 1966, shortly after two residents had died in unusual circumstances.

"We had an on-the-scene investigation and experts in and found the cause of the deaths (scalding) was faulty plumbing," Braisted said. "We also found the school to be badly understaffed."

The DA said he will listen to Stein's charges to determine if there is sufficient grounds to warrant an investigation by a grand jury. "If there is, there will surely be an investigation," Braisted said. But he was equally emphatic that there would be no investigation if the charges were groundless.

Stein said he was going to relate the increase in the number of deaths, which he claims have occurred at the school, to the lack of adequate staff and ask that possible criminal fault be studied.

He also said that he would ask for an investigation of rumors of possible sexual abuse of both male and female residents at the school and possible inhumane treatment by some attendants.

Braisted said that the grand jury investigation

in 1966 did not delve into the personal lives of those at the institution.

Stein, who has toured the Island school several times with press and television cameras, has depicted the buildings at Willowbrook as the most degrading he has ever seen.

To enlist federal support of his campaign to get more funds for the school, Stein has also demanded an investigation by the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

"The situation is going to get worse at Willowbrook if, as is expected, the government cuts Medicaid funds," the assemblyman asserted. "The school will lose 3,200 beds."

A ray of hope appeared late in the week when Gov. Rockefeller announced an increase in expenditures for the State Department of Mental Hygiene, which will permit Willowbrook to rehire half the personnel it lost due to attrition in the last year.

Dr. Jack Hammond, school director, said the budget freeze had forced a staff reduction from 3,492 to 2,716.

### Money the Root

No one disagrees with Stein that money is the root of the problems at Willowbrook — not the state health officials, not local legislators, not the Borough President, and not Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school.

Hammond, on numerous occasions, has admitted that a lack of staff resulting from a lack of funds has led to the curtailment of programs and services.

But there are other problems, officials at the state facility point out.

"There are 27 patients' buildings, but they are overcrowded by more than 1,000 residents," a spokesman for Hammond said. He said there were about 5,200 persons ranging in age from infancy to the 80s crowded into buildings suitable for 20% less.

### Not Suitable

"The type of care of the mentally retarded also has changed over the years," he said, "and many of the buildings are not suitable for waiting but custodial care."

The newer buildings on the 380-

acre site have been constructed to conform to the needs of therapy, he said.

Dr. Michael Wilkins, who was dismissed by Hammond two weeks ago for talking to the press, charged there were no vocational guidance type schools at Willowbrook from which the more educable could gain.

### Use Tranquilizers

He also charged that many of the inmates of the institution were given "massive" doses of tranquilizers to keep them passive and controllable. This instead of training, he asserted.

The spokesman for the school agreed that there were no vocational schools, but were academic ones. "We are required by the state education law to try to teach the residents how to read and write," he said.

"But because of lack of available money, we are simply not geared for vocational training."

### Admits Use

He agreed that many of the residents were under tranquilizers, but pointed out that they were used to keep the inmates, many of whom were dangerous to themselves and others, from doing any physical harm.

At least 80% of the residents at the school, he said, were so severely retarded and handicapped that they would never, under any circumstances, be able to fit into the normal world outside the Willowbrook gates.