

# State drops gag rule: New guidelines due

By RAYMOND A. WITTEK

The state agreed yesterday to rescind a controversial memorandum that forbade Willowbrook State School staff members from meeting with parent groups on school grounds without authorization, either during regular work hours or during off hours.

The state, however, received court permission to draw up a new set of guidelines governing the future relationship of staff members and parent groups. It was given until Jan. 28 to prepare the new guidelines.

Supreme Court Justice John A. Garbarino praised Robert L. Feldt, attorney in charge of the Staten Island Neighborhood Office of the Legal Aid Society, representing the parents of four children at the institution, and Deputy Assistant Attorney General David Spiegel for their efforts in arriving at the agreement in his chambers.

The judge, calling the case a "matter of great concern," expressed hope that "some middle ground will be worked out."

Feldt, in consenting to adjournment of the parents' action to Jan. 28, described the yielding on the part of the state

as a "hopeful and promising development."

He placed his finger on the central issue of the court action when he said the "great concern" is that parents be permitted to meet with staff members on a voluntary basis during and after normal work hours.

The agreement was reached prior to scheduled arguments in a show cause proceeding to annul the memorandum and was announced later in the courtroom to a group of about 25 parents and staff members present.

The parents brought the action against Dr. Alan Miller, commissioner of the state Mental Hygiene Department, and Dr. Jack Hammond, school director, whose Dec. 3 memorandum sparked the court fight.

The parents in their petition called the memorandum "arbitrary and capricious."

The parents said in court papers that they were unable to get any satisfaction from the school administration, and it was only when the group meetings were begun that "we became involved in the treatment of our children and began

to learn how we could contribute to their care."

A portion of the memorandum dealt with the payment of overtime or compensatory time. Feldt took exception to this in the petition, saying that staff members had made no such claims and had acted voluntarily.

Among those who conducted group meetings were Dr. Michael Wilkins, a medical practitioner, and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, a social worker. Despite top professional evaluations, including those by superiors, both were dismissed Jan. 6 by Dr. Hammond.

Dr. Hammond reportedly held the two responsible for the release of reports of child neglect and mistreatment which were first published in the Advance in a series of articles beginning in mid-November.

Among those present was William Katz, director of the Richmond County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He said he had been asked to attend by the judge.