

Boss to Seek Fewer Kids at Willowbrook

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Albany, Feb. 18 — Conceding that conditions at Willowbrook State School are "inhumane and intolerable," the director of the institution said today that he will ask parents of the inmates to take their children home to help relieve overcrowding at the Staten Island facility.

Dr. Jack Hammond, who has run Willowbrook since 1964, told the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental Hygiene hearing that he has been complaining each year, in his official budget request, about conditions at Willowbrook. He indicated that his pleas fell on deaf ears.

More than 400 angry parents, some with their mentally retarded children at their sides, applauded Hammond after his 10-minute testimony in which he said the state has to pump new money into the state schools for improvements, and must lift Gov. Rockefeller's job freeze so vacancies can be filled.

Hammond said the "deplorably overcrowded" Willowbrook has to reduce its population from the 5,000 there now to 3,200. And, he added, if the parents do not voluntarily take their children home then the Legislature should consider giving the mental hygiene department authority to force the parents of children who can be cared for at home to take them out of residential institutions such as Willowbrook.

He also asked the lawmakers to provide money to immediately staff and equip the nearly finished Kings County State School. It can't be opened because the department does not have the operating funds.

Require Intensive Care

Hammond also sought money to renovate and staff the state-owned Howard Park Hospital in Queens and the Sheridan Square facility in Manhattan, both newly acquired by the department from the State Narcotics Commission.

Dr. Alan J. Miller, commissioner of mental hygiene, told the legislators that the inmates of state schools are "the 5% of most severely disabled who require intensive care and training" and are hardest hit by any budget squeeze.

Robert Hodgson, president of the State Association for Retarded Children, said Miller and the mental hygiene department's top executives should be fired and replaced by a caretaker commission that would be appointed by the Legislature to revamp the entire structure for caring for the mentally retarded.

The hearings, chaired by State Sen. Dalwin Niles (R-Johnstown), will continue today.