

## State Panel Told of Peril In Hospitals

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ALBANY, Feb. 16 — As hundreds of concerned parents listened, the director of Willowbrook State School told a legislative hearing today that he had warned state officials each year since 1964 of the overcrowded conditions that finally led to the current public furor over the sight of retarded children left naked and uncared for.

A basic question—why must it take a public scandal to promote interest in such a severe problem?—was raised by several speakers, including a number of parents who testified angrily from experience and fought to hold back tears.

"When I see that Mall and then consider the building my son lives in at Willowbrook, I get sick," Mrs. Rosalie Amoroso of Staten Island declared, speaking of the sprawling state office project a block from the hearing at the Education Building.

"You build superhighways, grand malls and world trade centers and then cut the mental hygiene budget," Mrs. Amoroso told the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental and Physical Handicaps.

The director of Willowbrook, Dr. Jack Hammond, described the "devastating" loss of personnel—633 employees among 3,628 positions—caused by the budget freezes of the last two years. The situation has been aggravated by an overcrowding problem in which the population of 5,000 is still 1,800 above the ideal.

### No One Is Criticized

He did not criticize either the Governor or the Legislature, the originators of the cuts and freeze, in his testimony or in an interview after his testimony. While making his annual warnings in departmental correspondence, Dr. Hammond said he considered it "unethical and unprofessional" to seek out the media and complain during that time.

"What do you want me to do? Take a gun?" he said. "I can only importune the commissioner and the Legislature and trust in their wisdom. Ultimately, it comes down to taxpayers and how they rate this priority against roads and so forth."

Others at the hearing pressed again and again on this point of budget priorities. Theodore Brooks, father of a patient in Wassaic State School, showed detailed knowledge of how many limousines and chauffeurs were available in this austerity year to commissioners and legislative leaders. In contrast, he told how lack of personnel at Wassaic had led to his son's broken arm being ignored for five days until his mother visited.

### New Agency Urged

Robert Hodgson, president of the State Association for Retarded Children, was the first of many speakers to demand that care for the retarded in state schools, as distinct from the mentally ill in hospitals, be taken away from the Department of Mental Hygiene by a new state department.

Mr. Hodgson said that while the \$600-million proposed mental health budget for 1972-73 was being touted by state officials as a no-cut program, it actually represents a drop of \$26-million through salary increases and additional Federal aid included since last year.

Several speakers warned of the danger of relying on publicity as the impetus for change. "These scandals come and go almost as the

winds," said Mrs. Martin Eaton, who dwelled on the "attitudinal problem" of the public and said that greater acceptance of the handicapped in the community was needed.

### Governor Is Accused

Others said the Governor and other state officials had ignored repeated pleas for extra aid and warnings of Willowbrook-type problems until the media focused on them. Cited, in particular, was television with films of the severely retarded, soiled and untended on ward floors. Dr. Hammond said that the Governor's decision last month to make available \$20-million more for mental health jobs—including \$5-million for Willowbrook—did not seem related to the news exposés.

By the end of the first of two all-day hearings, six hours after the start, the large audience had dwindled to 20 spectators.

Dr. Alan D. Miller, the Commissioner of Mental Hygiene, whose warnings about the budget economies last year drew sharp anger from legislative leaders, spoke today of "healthy changes" in the system during the last decade and of the "sensitivity and wisdom" of the legislative committee.