

# Admissions Are Halted at Crowded Willowbrook

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Special to The New York Times

ALBANY, Feb. 20 — Willowbrook State School for the mentally retarded, the focus of repeated public furor over its overcrowding and innate neglect, is no longer accepting new patients.

An indefinite freeze on admissions has been ordered at the Staten Island institution to reduce the present population of 5,100 patients to 3,000.

While dealing with this severe trouble spot, however, state officials say their plan to open more than 500 beds now available in newly renovated, smaller neighborhood centers in the city has been blocked by lack of state funds for hiring staff workers.

Meanwhile, troubled families continue to make 40 to 50 applications a month, despite Gothic-like tales of severely retarded children left untended in filth. One desperate man recently threatened to kill his child and himself unless the state found room for the child, according to Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook.

## Emergency Cases Sent Away

Even emergency cases that used to go to Willowbrook are being sent, instead, to institutions outside the city after screening and review by the office of Dr. Frederic Grunberg, the state deputy commissioner of mental health in charge of mental retardation.

Dr. Grunberg said today that the waiting list for Willowbrook at the time the freeze was ordered last month totaled about 1,600 children, but of these he estimated that perhaps 500 were in true need of institutionalization, with the rest more suited to other kinds of care where available. Last year, Willowbrook accepted close to 300 new patients.

Willowbrook's "protective wall," as one official referred to the freeze, was ordered at a time when budget economies by the Legislature and Governor Rockefeller had cut the institution's staff by 633 workers in the last 14 months, and frozen 279 other vacancies.

The present staff numbers are 700, with several hundred more due to be hired under a \$5-million appropriation made last month by Governor Rockefeller following publicity about conditions at Willowbrook.

Dr. Grunberg said that 1,200 new workers were needed but not budgeted for, as staff for four new centers renovated as part of the department's plan to relate treatment facilities more closely to local neighborhoods. One center, a renovated motel on 114th Street, Corona, Queens, is open but has staff people for only 50 of its capacity of 200 beds, he said.

The others which are ready but unused, are a 300-bed facility on Morton Street, Manhattan, and an 80-bed, converted former yeshiva on South Second Street, in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

For the second year in a row, money is particularly tight in Albany and the competition is strong, even within the mental health field.

Dr. Hammond, Willowbrook's director, estimates that if enough such alternatives as special home and hostel care were available, about one-sixth of the institution's present population might be released. Letters were sent to the parents of 4,930 patients in December, 1970, asking whether any of them might be able to take

their children back home because of the overcrowding.

Dr. Hammond said. There were 24 replies, he said, and "one or two" children went home.

It would be unfair to criticize such parents, Dr. Hammond added, because the mentally retarded child who is overactive day and night can make a home a "shambles."

Parent groups, in turn, criticize the state for not providing enough funds for alternative forms of care and for allegedly emphasizing supervisory personnel over basic-care attendants.