

# \$2-million suit slapped on state administrators

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A \$2-million suit naming the top three administrators of the state Department of Mental Hygiene and 12 others of Willowbrook State School was filed late yesterday afternoon in Brooklyn Federal Court.

Complainants in the suit are Dr. Michael Wilkens and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, former Willowbrook employees; Eleanor Ashe, a present employee; the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, and Anthony Pinto, president of the society.

Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, who publicized conditions at the school, claim in the suit that their discharge from Willowbrook resulted from acts of reprisal by Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene; Frederick Grunberg, deputy commissioner; Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook administrator, and Dr. Milton Jacobs and Dr. Manny Sternlicht, both assistant directors. All are named in the suit.

The complainants further claim that the discharge of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee violates their rights and those of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children to engage in free speech and peaceful assemblies, to meet with the press and to fulfill their responsibility to seek the best care and treatment for their patients.

The two former employees say that the design and the effect of their discharge has been to restrain parents and other staff members from further publicizing conditions in the school.

The suit alleges that the demonstration by employees opposing the reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee was arranged by the Willowbrook administration and that Dr. Hammond refused to meet with Wilkins, Pinto and Mrs. Lee on the pretext that employee opposition prevented any sort of reconciliation.

The complaint continues that Jan. 28 the defendants published a leaflet containing "defamatory statements about Dr. Wilkins, accusing him of disloyal and subversive affiliations and activities."

Those leaflets, it is charged, were widely distributed to parents of Willowbrook patients, employees, public officials and the press.

"They (the defendants) sought to create the illusion of widespread employee opposition to the rehiring and sought to arouse fear and suspicion among Willowbrook employees

with rumors that the parents had 'taken over' the institution and that Hammond had been fired and other supervisors would be next."

The plaintiffs seek \$1 million for compensatory damage and an equal amount for punitive damage. They further demand the reinstatement of Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee with full back pay and benefits.

Also sought is a cease and desist order that would permit peaceful assembly by the Benevolent Society, meetings among parents, doctors and social workers and public disclosures by employees about the conditions without reprisals.

Others named in the suit are Harold Wolfe, assistant director of the Department of Mental Hygiene and the following members of the Willowbrook staff:

Ernest Palcic, business administrator; Jarvis Tabor, personnel director; Mary Kelly, chief of nursing services and training; Marie Salvatore, chief supervisor of nurses; James O'Hora, chief supervising nurse; Otilie Ruff, principal stenographer; Hanna Glasser, institutional educational director; Thomas Delaney, payroll officer, and Dr. William Frew, clinical physician to the supervisor of Building 2.

The defendants have 20 days to answer the charges.