

# Willowbrook deaths linked to staff cuts

By RICHARD CHADY

ALBANY — (UPI) — Mental Hygiene Commissioner Dr. Alan D. Miller said yesterday increased deaths at Willowbrook State School could be attributed "in part" to a staff shortage forced by state budget cuts.

After testifying at a legislative fiscal hearing, Miller told newsmen that about 130 persons died at the massive, Staten Island facility last year, compared to 90 the year before.

"Certainly, it is very complicated to determine all the factors involved," he said. "But, I think if you could examine each one, instance by instance, some could be attributed in part to the reduction."

For example, he said, a severely retarded child could choke to death on food if left unattended.

Miller told the hearing that the department's proposed \$600-million budget needed a minimum of \$15 million more to refill some jobs eliminated and to improve conditions at state schools and mental hospitals.

After earlier quoting the Bible and poet William Yeats, the bearded, pipe-smoking commissioner reminded legislators of an old farm saying: Never eat your seed corn."

"We've been eating our seed corn," he said. "It has been very short-sighted and, in years to come, it will cost the state a great deal."