

Local voice for retarded gets support

By JANE KURTIN

Some 75 parents of children in Willowbrook State School assembled at 57 St. and Fifth Ave. in Manhattan yesterday and within an hour and a half gathered more than 500 signatures in support of a Democratic bill which calls for the decentralization of the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

The bill was introduced Monday by Assemblyman Andrew Stein, who inspected Willowbrook in December.

Stein's bill calls for the creation of a Division of Developmental Disorders, spread over 11 areas of New York State to correspond with 11 areas already delineated by

the Department of Mental Hygiene.

"Each of these areas," Stein explained, "will have a planning board composed 60 per cent of parents and 40 per cent of specialists in the fields of developmental disabilities."

"These boards," Stein continued, "would provide services and new programs for all the developmentally disabled."

Stein explained that this bill differs from a previous suggestion that a Department of Mental Retardation function independent of the Department of Mental Hygiene, in that the original state agency would still maintain power to approve plans suggested by the area boards.

"However," Stein added, "it would be the function of the Department of Mental Hygiene to act on the recommendations of the boards."

Each area board, Stein said, would establish facilities to carefully screen patients already in institutions like Willowbrook to determine whether or not they should be there.

Each area board would also undertake the responsibility of providing community services for the retarded.

"It is stipulated," Stein said, "that for the first year each area board would carry on screening and planning, and in the second year each board will have to have constructed a regional center."

Stein's bill is receiving support from many parents of children at Willowbrook State School who are dissatisfied with the current Department of Mental Hygiene administration.

"With these boards," one parent said, "at least the families can feel that they still have something to say about how their children are cared for."