

# Willowbrook awaits

# Albany decision on cash

By JANE KURTIN

Whether or not the legislators of New York have been sufficiently impressed with the disclosure of conditions at Willowbrook and other state schools will become evident soon as the Legislature decides on the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene budget for the 1972-73 fiscal year.

From the outset, next year's picture of the institutions promises to be grim. Budget requests — never mind actual

appropriations — are startlingly lower than those for the 1971-72 fiscal year.

Last year Gov. Rockefeller proposed a \$630-million budget for the Department of Mental Hygiene. Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the department, pleaded that the legislature appropriate that sum, saying that budget cuts would result in deaths of patients in the institutions.

Despite the ominous predictions (which have come to pass) legislators voted on a \$595.5-million budget which was ultimately frozen at \$580 million. The budget freeze, coupled with the state imposed job freeze, sent the institutions hurtling toward disaster.

This year Gov. Rockefeller has requested a budget of \$600 million for the Department of Mental Hygiene which is in keeping with his promise that 1972-73 will be a "no growth period."

Harold Wolfe, assistant director of the department, anticipated that \$600 million would mean that Willowbrook and other state facilities would be able to maintain themselves

as they are with possibly an increase in personnel.

The Department of Mental Hygiene is asking for \$17 million above Rockefeller's suggested \$600 million, although, according to Wolfe, Miller has said that \$50 million could easily be used to improve services.

Included in the \$600 million is \$8 million to cover mandated civil service salary increases and the possibility exists — although it has not yet been confirmed — that institutions will have to take money of the top of their 1972-73 budgets to cover 1971-72 deficits.

"If we are given the full \$617 million" Wolfe explained, "or anything in that area, we will unquestionably be able to do a great deal about the bad situation in New York City."

The money, Wolfe said, would be used to staff and equip four new community centers with combined residential and day care facilities which, in addition to accepting a limited number of new patients, would accept transfers from Willowbrook, Letchworth Village and Wassaic State Schools.

"In the coming months we could begin to transfer out of Willowbrook" Wolfe claimed, "and we could probably close admissions in Letchworth and Wassaic as we have already done at Willowbrook. And you'll notice," he continued, "that we will not be reducing the number of employes while the patient census is decreased."

Wolfe said that with the \$600 million about 1,500 employes of the 5,000 which were lost since Dec. 1970 could be replaced.

"With the amount we're requesting we could also hire between 2,000 and 3,000 employes for the same period

which are Kings State School in Brooklyn, Queens State School in Corona, Queens, Williamsberg Sub-Division of Kings State School, also in Brooklyn and Sheridan Park Unit of Manhattan State School in Manhattan."

Also, Wolfe said, the Department of Mental Hygiene would begin to utilize bed space available in Creedmoor, Harlem Valley, Middletown and Rockland State Hospitals. The total number of beds (which does not include the number of patients to utilize day care facilities) between those in the

state hospitals and in the four new community facilities, is 2,230.

The number of transfers needed from Willowbrook alone could nearly fill those beds which are meant to relieve the critical overcrowding in five state institutions for the retarded.

Wolfe said that the smaller budget request for this year "reflects the fiscal situation in New York." It also diminishes the hope that neglected patients in Willowbrook will have better housing, education, health care and chances of survival.