

Separation's the remedy

The battle over whether or not services to the mentally retarded should be split from the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene is between two groups. Some maintain that these services have until now been totally inadequate. Others claim that despite problems within the present system, a new system is not the answer.

But it's obvious that the defense of the existing method of providing care and education for the retarded is the same defense applied to any established institution — good or bad. That is that "it's not the best, maybe, but it's the only thing we have."

Granted a breakaway from the larger Department of Mental Hygiene would create new problems, cost a lot of money and initially, a lot of confusion. But if now is not the right time to make the move, would there ever be a right time?

There are a myriad of good arguments for a large family but certainly, being an only child can have its advantages. The retarded have been part of an enormous family watched over by the parent Department of Mental Hygiene and have been losing out.

The "brighter" children in the unit — the alcoholics, addicts, emotionally disturbed, etc. — have enjoyed more popularity, seen the development of more programs to help them and used up most of a massive budget.

The treatment of the retarded is expensive, specialized, and doesn't belong in the same bag with almost every other kind of emotional disorder.

Difficult as it may be to get off the ground, a separate Department of Mental Retardation promises at least to provide one crucial quality for all these patients — undivided attention.