

# State agency opposes independent unit for retarded

By JANE KURTIN

In the furor over conditions at Willowbrook and other state schools, Sen. Edward Conklin introduced a bill to the Legislature calling for the creation of a Department of Mental Retardation independent of the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene.

Through two days of hearings held in February by the Joint Legislative Committee on Mental and Physical Handicap, hundreds of people almost unanimously voiced their support

of Conklin's bill and their increasing disenchantment with the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Last week the Assembly passed the measure 139-4 and forwarded it to Gov. Rockefeller. The New York State Department of Mental Hygiene is less than delighted with the move.

Although Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the department, nor any other ranking official has issued a public statement against the bill, a strong argument against it was delivered when the legislature was considering its passage.

The basic argument for a separate Department of Mental Retardation claims that the Department of Mental Hygiene has too many diverse interests to give adequate attention and money to the retarded.

In addition to responsibility for the retarded, this department concerns itself with mental illness, alcoholism and narcotic addiction, to name a few.

## LITTLE FILTERS DOWN

So, critics say, while this department has a tremendous operating budget, proportionately little of the money appropriated filters its way down for retardation programs.

But the Department of Mental Hygiene has always maintained that the trouble in delivering services to the retarded was not in their administration but in a drastic shortage of funds for the entire state.

Now that things are looking a little better for the state schools, spokesmen for the department are claiming that the establishment of a special agency for care of the retarded would create chaos and wipe out progress which has been made to date.

Representatives of Mental Hygiene told the legislature "all the major programs put forth by the Governor and the Legislature were aimed at consolidating and improving services to the mentally disabled over the past several years.

"The feeling of the department was that mental retardation bill would fragment these services, requiring duplication of many personnel and other expenses which would cost the state about \$10 million more annually just to cover things like administration, but would not provide program improvements.

The argument was made that "the whole pattern of the federally sponsored Developmental Disabilities Program is administered in New York State by the Department of Mental Hygiene and it literally calls for consolidation rather than fragmentation.

"In the 1971 report to the

Governor of the New York State Committee for Children—made up of 100 experts in a wide variety of service specialties — a consolidated child advocacy system for handicapped children was recommended. The bill would segregate the retarded into a special office singling them out from all other developmental disabilities and further complicating the contractual and organizational requirements for services from other agencies already providing such services."

Also pointed out in the argument for a consolidated Department of Mental Hygiene was the fact that "in more than half of the states in the nation the responsibility for services to the mentally retarded are assigned to the departments of mental hygiene. Included in these states are those with the most advanced programs."