

Legislation asks for federal funds to aid retarded

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OF OUR WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — Citing deplorable conditions at Willowbrook State School, Congressman John M. Murphy, Staten Island Democrat, yesterday filed legislation which would provide federal funds to upgrade and improve services at residential facilities for the mentally retarded.

Murphy termed his measure "a bill of rights for the mentally retarded." The legislation has bipartisan support in the House and in the Senate, where it was filed by Sen. Jacob Javits, R-N.Y.

Javits, ranking Republican member of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, introduced the bill jointly with Sen. Harrison Williams, D-N.J. Murphy introduced the bill with 41 co-sponsors.

In a speech to the Senate announcing the bill, Javits said that although he has long been concerned with the rights of the mentally retarded, he was "shocked and troubled" when public attention focused on the conditions at Willowbrook.

It was after learning of that that he asked the federal government "to do everything in its power to assist the State of New York in improving the situation at Willowbrook and any other New York State institution with similar difficulties." Although the federal

government has investigated and offered assistance to the state, Javits said the experience convinced him that only legislation on the federal level setting strict standards for care of the mentally retarded could help eliminate some of the abuses which have been uncovered.

In a House speech, Murphy referred to a recent visit by Department of Health, Education and Welfare officials to Willowbrook and said that his bill is "an outgrowth of the federal inspection tour."

"As a result of the HEW visit which was attended by myself and several other members of Congress, we have formulated a bill which will begin to eliminate conditions epitomized by Willowbrook, but which exist for the bulk of the 200,000 mentally retarded persons who are in residential treatment centers on any given day in the United States," Murphy said.

The Island Democrat said that a lack of financial support for the mentally retarded is the major cause of substandard conditions in residential institutions.

"Willowbrook alone had 900 unfilled staff positions because of the state's financial inability to fill the vacancies. This means that in the sections housing the most severely retarded, instead of the standard staff-patient ratio of one to four, the ratio was one staff to 20 patients," Murphy said.

To ease the financial burden on state institutions, Murphy's bill would authorize \$45 million in the next three years for states to develop comprehensive plans for establishing and upgrading residential facilities for the mentally retarded; authorize an additional \$45 million over a three year period to improve services provided by existing facilities, and authorize necessary federal grants to private non-profit organizations for development of community living facilities for the mentally retarded.

At the heart of Murphy's bill is a requirement that state residential facilities for the retarded meet basic federal standards before qualifying for financial assistance under the bill.

"For too long in America our institutions for exceptional children have remained in dark recesses separated from the rest of the community by high walls — or distance — or both," Murphy said.

"This legislation is an attempt to shed light where there is now darkness, and to bring to our nation's retarded the sunlight of hope for a future free from the intolerable conditions which are exemplified by the worst of Willowbrook," he said.