

Bids state to use parents' aid

Judge orders timetable for Willowbrook

A federal judge in Brooklyn yesterday ordered the state Department of Mental Hygiene to establish a timetable to improve conditions at Willowbrook State School.

Judge Orrin G. Judd ordered state officials to detail by Dec. 18 in several specified areas progress they will have made by Sept. 1 and gains they hope to achieve by Dec. 31, 1972.

Moreover, Judd ordered the state to respond to the offer to help by parents of Willowbrook residents and to describe how their services could be used.

Simultaneously, Judd postponed any decision on a preliminary injunction against the school's operation and agreed to consolidate the suits by individual parents and by groups, including the Staten Island Legal Aid Society, the New York Civil Liberties Union and the New York State Association for Retarded Children on the petitioners' joint request.

Judd issued the orders in an eight-page document filed at the U.S. District Court offices in Brooklyn.

"Conditions at Willowbrook are largely inhumane," Judd wrote, and both the various state officials named as defendants and the petitioners in each suit share the goals of their alleviation.

However, he said, the opponents differ on the timetable for certain improvements, the parents favoring acceleration of a pace the state said is already as fast as possible.

"There is a real controversy," Judd said.

The areas for response are petitioners' demands for medical examinations for all 5,000 institution residents, increases in the number of attendants and physical therapists, elimination of seclusion practices, provision of carts containing emergency supplies, delineation of emergency escape procedures for such contingencies as fire, and indefinite continuance of the freeze on admissions.

The state is in the process of decentralization of authority at Willowbrook, made possible by the hiring of persons to fill most of the 900 positions that were made vacant by attrition during the two years ending last winter.

Dr. Miodrag Ristic, the acting director said the decentralization would facilitate the improvement of residents to the extent that they would be acceptable for other, more personalized situations, such as community services on an inpatient or outpatient basis or return to their families.

Ristic said Willowbrook would eventually become a center for profoundly retarded Staten Island residents.

Willowbrook has been in the national spotlight since the Advance last November disclosed examples of widespread neglect and abuse.

Public pressure on legislators resulted in special allocations to fill the positions and this stimulated the movement throughout the state to implement an idea widely favored by psychiatrists specializing in mental retardation, to replace mammoth institutions with more intimate services.