

Editorials

More aid must come

While Family Court Judge Ralph E. Cory and District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr. have determined that conditions at Willowbrook State School are beyond their scope, they have made it eminently clear that the situation, as depicted in our news columns dating back to last November, has been sadly all too true.

One has the definite impression that both men would have liked to step in and force some changes to be made. The judge, however, found that his court lacked jurisdiction. The district attorney had the same problem, in effect, because he found no evidence of criminality.

Both were affected by the evidence before them, as everyone has been who visited Willowbrook State School. In sum, conditions must be improved for the patients.

In urging Albany to act, the judge observed, "The time for rhetoric, excuses and regret has long since past."

The district attorney faulted the governor, the Legislature and others in the state government for failing to provide the funds so that sufficient personnel might be hired and that overcrowding might be ended.

In a sense, then, we have it on the official record. A judge elected on a Republican ticket and a district attorney elected on the Democrat line make it bipartisan, that the newspaper accounts told it like it is.

This doesn't make the situation any better. It simply gives official credence to ugly conditions.

What we hope comes out of all this, and we so stated some months ago, is a startling improvement.

Some small inroads have been made. The state did find some money somehow after trimming the Willowbrook operation to an insufferable level. Additional attendants, those hard-working people who make an institution go, have been hired. And the Willowbrook leadership, has been making some promising efforts to get the number of patients down to a manageable level.

From the medical and managerial points of view, it's obvious that new techniques must be initiated. The day of the giant institution, with patients treated as herded animals, has to go. There must be a better and more efficient way of caring for these unfortunates.

We think Governor Rockefeller must speak out on the subject. The governor is the chief executive of the state and, while we recognize the impossibility of his becoming enmeshed in every specific issue, we feel this is one important enough to take a personal hand.

We think the Legislature, too, must be called upon for an accounting. To date, its record has not been encouraging. It has tended to treat Mental Hygiene as an easy area for the economy ax. The helpless patients are in no position to picket Albany's Capitol Hill or the Executive Mansion.

And our own three state representatives — two assemblyman and a state senator — should be less remote on the conditions at Willowbrook.

They should be frequent visitors at the institution to find out what needs to be done and how it can be done, what funds are required to operate properly this institution and others like it throughout the state.

It's true that there are precious few votes to be gained by this effort, but the responsible course is clearly marked for those concerned with the welfare of all mankind.