

# Order Willowbrook Reply in Abuse Case

By THOMAS POSTER

In a landmark ruling a judge on Staten Island has ordered the Willowbrook State School for the Mentally Retarded to answer charges of maltreatment of a patient.

The case could pave the way for similar complaints to be filed by relatives or guardians of

patients in all state mental institutions, Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-C Bronx), who initiated the proceeding, said yesterday. Supreme Court Justice Vito Titone ordered Dr. Alan Miller, state mental hygiene commissioner, Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, to answer Biaggi's complaint that they are "derelict in their obligation to protect the health, safety and welfare of patients in their care."



Rep. Mario Biaggi

## Hearing Date Set

The court ordered the hearing for Sept. 20 in Staten Island Supreme Court.

Biaggi has been a sharp critic of Willowbrook, which has long been overcrowded and short of staff. Similar complaints have also been made by Dr. Hammond before legislative committees in Albany.

Because the complaints brought little official reaction, Biaggi petitioned the courts, which have

refused to accept citizen suits against the state or its agencies unless the state first consented to be a party to an action.

"I am grateful that Justice Titone has made this courageous and landmark decision," Biaggi said. "This is a classic case of maltreatment and neglect that occurs in our state-operated schools for the retarded and, if we succeed, we succeed for all the retarded in our state institutions."

## Claims Girl Was Beaten

Biaggi is representing Mrs. Amelia Renelli, a constituent, who charges that her daughter, Adrienne, 21, was severely beaten at Willowbrook.

Biaggi said he went to the school, where the patient has lived since she was 10, and said he found her suffering from severe injuries. He said she was abused by other patients because of lack of proper supervision.

In granting Biaggi the hearing, Justice Titone issued an opinion in which he said, "The court clearly has jurisdiction to conduct a hearing on the charges brought that Adrienne had been subjected to physical abuse because the petitioners have substantiated these charges with factual affidavits and photographs."