



December 26, 1972

Editor  
The New York Post  
210 South Street  
New York, New York 10002

Dear Sir:

We appreciate your continuing concern for the children in our care at Willowbrook State School and your continuing interest in our efforts to improve their care.

Your editorial of December 23, however, about the lack of a written plan for improving conditions at Willowbrook, illustrates the danger of basing editorial comment on extremely limited information--in this instance, I suspect, a fragmentary news story in The Post.

If time had permitted thorough research, you would have learned that the Department of Mental Hygiene does have a written plan, approved and specifically funded by the Governor and the State Legislature in March 1972, for improving care and treatment at Willowbrook. And you would have learned that steps have been, and continue to be, taken to carry out the plan.

Today, for example, there are 400 more clinical employees working at Willowbrook than nine months ago. And there are 500 fewer residents at the facility. The increase in staff is the result of an unprecedented hiring drive. The decrease in resident population is the result primarily of transfers to five new state mental retardation facilities in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, and of increased community placements. By the end of the current fiscal year (March 31, 1973), moreover, we plan to decrease the resident population at Willowbrook by another 500; and by the end of the following fiscal year, by an additional 1,000.

The death rate at Willowbrook is down 37 percent from a year ago. Admissions have been closed. Seclusion has been ended. Willowbrook is being reorganized into smaller, more manageable units. And a housekeeping staff of 175 employees to serve all wards is being recruited.

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The written plan which is governing our efforts is a matter of public record. It was available to the press in the form of two open affidavits (copies are enclosed), dated July 14, 1972 and September 15, 1972, submitted to the Federal Judge who is hearing the case on Willowbrook. The plan, and the steps taken to implement it, have also been publicized in nine news releases (copies enclosed) issued by this department since May 2, 1972.

Willowbrook still falls short of providing all its residents with the kind of care and treatment they need. The problem did not occur overnight; it has long historical and complex social roots. Ongoing efforts to solve the problem were dealt a severe setback by the fiscal crisis of 1971. Your readers need to know these facts. They should never be allowed to forget them. But they also need to know--in the interest of promoting sustained public support of corrective measures--about the efforts of concerned men and women to make Willowbrook and all our other state schools centers of decent care and effective rehabilitation.

Sincerely yours,

HAROLD WOLFE  
Assistant Commissioner  
for Communications

HW/hs  
Encs.

bcc: Dr. Miller  
Dr. Grunberg  
Mr. Hayes  
Mr. Hodsdon  
Mr. Morrow  
Mr. Thomas  
Mr. Elisha  
Mr. Spoor  
Dr. Ristic  
Ms Soloff/Ms Gordon