

Willowbrook funds boosted by \$5 million

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ALBANY — Gov. Rockefeller's proposed \$8.8 billion budget for fiscal 1973-74 includes a \$5 million increase in funds for Willowbrook State School "to reduce overcrowding and start better programming," a Department Mental Hygiene official said last week.

The proposed budget calls for \$35.5 million for increased staff and services at Willowbrook, a

jump from \$30.7 million over this fiscal year.

The added money will be used to beef up the school's community services division, which attempts to place patients in foster care homes, halfway houses and hostels, and to improve other staff services. There will be a "slight" increase in staff, from 3,270 to about 3,400, according to the department.

The increased funding of the community services function is

part of the state's program to reduce the patient population at Willowbrook.

There were 5,200 patients in January 1972," the official said, "and there are 4,650 now. We want to have it down to 4,200 by the end of March, and to 3,000 by next March."

The spokesman said that most of the transferred patients will be moved either to newer facilities, such as the Kings County State School in Brooklyn, which opened two

months ago, or to other, smaller facilities.

One example of such smaller facilities are the hostels set up by the state over the last few years, which have resident staff and a capacity of about 10 patients. They are "community homes for those patients who can work in the community" and provide a social program for their residents.

There are presently 20 hostels in the state, with a total capacity of 200, and 15 to 25

new hostels are in the budget for next year, "a good share of them in the New York City area," according to the department aide.

The state official also stressed that most of the patients transferred would be moved to locations closer to their families.

Other uses for the increased funds available to Willowbrook will be a stepped-up program of maintenance and repair work on the school grounds and in-

creased in-service training of staff.

The basic goal, however, remains to reduce overcrowding. "If we can create a situation where there are fewer residents for the same size staff to take care of," the aide said, "then services will improve."

Other budget requests relating to Willowbrook include \$800,000 in the capital budget for planning and design of air-conditioning facilities in all of the buildings, \$136,000 for insect

screens on the terraces of the baby buildings, and \$2.1 million for hostels and halfway houses at Willowbrook.

The air-conditioning project will eventually cost the state \$5.4 million.

There will be public hearings on the budget conducted next month by the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. The budget will then be submitted to the Legislature for approval.