

Phase out all state schools, they urge

By LARRY SIMONBERG

ALBANY, (AP) — Two influential state legislators from Brooklyn introduced bipartisan legislation yesterday that would phase out state schools for the mentally retarded and replace them with smaller, community-based facilities.

The proposal was made by Senate Deputy Republican Majority Leader William T. Conklin and Assembly Democratic Minority Leader Stanley Steingut.

"For some time," they said in a statement, "we have urged the Department of Mental Hygiene to cease building new institutions. Last year, we co-sponsored legislation to create a new Department of Mental Retardation. The bill was vetoed by the governor."

Conklin and Steingut said community residences, group houses and foster care programs would "humanize" care for the retarded.

The Brooklyn legislators also called for creation of an "ombudsman for the handicapped."

"Despite expressions of concern for handicapped children and adults in our

laws," they said, "nowhere do we have, except through the courts, a machinery for listening to and acting as an advocate for the handicapped."

Conklin and Steingut contended that transferring the 23,000 institutionalized retarded children and adults to small community facilities would cut the cost of care and treatment in half.

Their proposal would require the Department of Mental Hygiene to produce a plan on phasing out of the state schools for submission to the legislature by March 1, 1974.

The Conklin-Steingut plan was announced only a day after a state council called for splitting up the much-criticized Willowbrook State School on Staten Island into five separate facilities, one in each borough of New York City.

Willowbrook has been likened to a "human warehouse," where treatment is virtually non-existent and care is inadequate. Conklin and Steingut used the phrase "human warehouse" to describe all of the state schools.