STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, Friday, April 20, 1973

State official tours 2 Island facilities

By POLLY KUMMEL

State Sen. James Donovan toured the Arthur Kill Rehabilitation Center, Charleston, and Willowbrook State School yesterday in his capacity as chairman of the Committee on Mental Hygiene and Addiction Control.

Donovan has been visiting drug rehabilitation and dentention centers in the New York City area this week — Daytop Village, Odyssey House, Phoenix House, Bellevue and the Tombs — to gain an understanding of the "big picture" of services for the addict.

He said that he was "most impressed" with Arthur Kill. Donovan noted after the tour that in the past few days he has achieved a greater knowledge of the types of programs available and expressed confidence that the gain would help him to function more completely in his new chairmanship.

Donovan, whose district is the Rome-Utica area, said he sees a need to "restore public confidence in these programs. Many people have spoken disparagingly of them, yet they have not availed themselves of the privilege of inspecting what NACC (Narcotics Addiction Control Commission) is providing."

The upstate senator sought the opportunity to speak with residents during the stops in the living quarters at the center. Many of the men were involved in group sessions as the VIPs came through, but seemed pleased to meet Donovan and answer his questions.

Some of the residents took advantage of director Virgil Hodges' presence to air minor gripes (he's known as The Man), but most seemed to feel they were making real progress.

Hodges and Fiorello Cicero, assistant director, took the group through the classroom areas, academic as well as vociational, and the recreation facilities — music practice rooms, the gymnasium, the pool and a session in the weightlifting room.

After lunch at Arthur Kill the senator and his entourage — Richard Rones, director of legislation for the Legal Aid Society of New York City; Joann Constantino, assistant to the senator; Kevin Blaney, counsel to the senator; David Diamond, legal counsel to the commission, and William Hopkins of Donovan's office — left for an inspection of Willowbrook, led by Harry Elizarian, deputy director of administration.

"I am interested in observing some of the deficiences the judge pointed out (Eastern District Court Judge Orrin G. Judd, who ruled on additional hiring, prevention of seclusion, repair of toilets, earlier this month) and to see how they are prepared to comply with his order.

"It behooves me as chairman," Donovan pointed out, "to identify with as many of these institutions as possible."

He added that although yesterday marked his first visit to Willowbrook itself, that he was familiar with its type of institution from frequent visits to the state school Rome, N.Y.

Donovan and his staff left for Portland, Maine, immediately after the Willowbrook visit to inspect a private drug rehabilitation center there, one which has sent personnel to testify before the New York committee on several occasions. He indicated that later this month, he would be touring several of the federally funded drug rehabilitation institutions.