

# State orders Willowbrook to rehire 5

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

The State Human Rights Commission has ordered the Willowbrook Development Center to reinstate one black and four white guards who lost their jobs last April because of discrimination, the Advance learned yesterday.

The commission also ordered Willowbrook to provide all four guards with back salary and mental anguish damages and to pay the medical bills of two of the men who were hospitalized while they were unemployed.

In the text of the order, the commission found that the black guard, Elijah Beaufort, was harassed and then maneuvered into being fired by three of his white superiors, Anthony Ragucci, the chief safety supervisor; Matthew Quintavalli, a shift manager, and John Aduitory, a desk officer. The commission further found that the four guards, Joseph O'Brien, William Seery, Robert Lentz, and Norman Johansen lost their jobs when they refused to cooperate in the discrimination against Beaufort.

"I am glad to get my job back," Beaufort said last night.

"But before this, I wouldn't have thought that I'd be treated like this in New York. It was worse than being in Marine boot camp."

According to George Felton, (Continued on Page 10)

president of Staten Island Branch, National Association of Colored People, the order is a major victory for blacks employed at Willowbrook.

"There is a general pattern of discrimination at Willowbrook," he said. "This order is just a forerunner of things to come. We plan to bring class action in behalf of blacks at Willowbrook in the future."

Felton also said that Willowbrook can appeal the

decision. But a successful appeal, he claimed, was unlikely since the white supervisors failed to appear at a public hearing in August when testimony was heard on the case.

According to the text of the order, the chain of events leading up to the firings began when Ragucci unsuccessfully urged O'Brien and Seery to make a false report that Beaufort had raped an inmate. Beaufort, who was then forced to patrol in a guard car alone in violation of Willowbrook policy, was open to such a charge because he would not have had any witnesses to support his denial.

After the incident, the order says, Beaufort refused to patrol alone and, when he defied direct orders to do so from Quintavalli and Ragucci, he was fired as of April 24. The four white guards lost their jobs a short time later when they refused to take Beaufort's place and complained about the discrimination against him.

The order also describes earlier harassment of Beaufort, who was the only black on the 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. guard shift at Willowbrook. The report says that the white superiors often addressed Beaufort as "nigger" and at least on one occasion made it plain that they wanted him to transfer to the "nigger shift" from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

In March, the order says, Beaufort left his car to help firemen during a blaze at Willowbrook and returned to find that the vehicle had a flat tire and that the coil wire had been removed. He was charged by Quintavalli with abandoning the car and then put on foot patrol for 10 days.

While on foot patrol, the report continues, Beaufort caught the flu and was sick for three days. He came back to work with a certificate from a doctor, but Ragucci rejected it on the grounds that it didn't specify the illness. Beaufort was docked a day's pay.

Later in March, the report says, Beaufort was accused of stealing 20 gallons of gas that he and his partner had requisitioned with the full knowledge of Quintavalli, the man who made the charge. Beaufort denied the charge, explaining that he did not own a car.

According to Beaufort, the Human Rights Commission arranged several conciliatory meetings in June between the guards and officials and the state Department of Mental Hygiene, which runs Willowbrook. At the meetings, the officials agreed to rehire the guards at a state institution, but refused to reinstate them at Willowbrook.