

NAACP suits attack Willowbrook guard union

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

The Staten Island Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has filed two improper practice suits in Albany against the

union that represents guards at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

The suits, which were filed with the state Public Employment Relations Board last week, allege that Local 1700 of the Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees failed to protect the rights of two black guards who were fired earlier this year.

"The purpose of the suits is to make all the guards at Willowbrook aware that they should look to the union when they are subject to harassment by their supervisors," according to George Felton, president of the Island NAACP.

The first suit, filed Sept. 26, concerns Elijah Beaufort, who with the help of the state Human Rights Commission is now fighting for reinstatement at Willowbrook. He was fired in April after he refused to patrol in a car alone, arguing that this practice was in violation of guard policy at the institution.

SECOND SUIT

The second suit, filed Sept. 30, concerns another former guard, Floyd McCoy. His job was terminated in January shortly after the union advised him to sign an agreement saying that he would automatically lose his job if a weapons charge against him in New Jersey resulted in a conviction.

According to Felton, however, the eventual conviction was just the pretext for McCoy's firing. Willowbrook initiated an inquiry into the weapons charge only after McCoy had quarreled with one of his supervisors, Joseph Ragucci.

Moreover, Felton continued, the weapons charge was already two years old at the time and would have been dropped if Willowbrook had made the inquiry.

According to an official at the

Public Employment Relations Board, an informal conference will be arranged at some future date between the NAACP and the union. If the conference fails to resolve the suits, he said, the board will hold hearings to determine if litigation against the union is warranted.

In other developments concerning the Beaufort case, Willowbrook has filed an appeal of an Aug. 30 decision by the state Human Rights Commission ordering the mental institution to rehire the black guard and four white guards who also lost their jobs in April. The four were fired after each of them refused to take Beaufort's place alone in the patrol car and complained about racial discrimination against him.

The commission will hold hearings on the appeal Oct. 30 at the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

According to the text of the commission's decision, the chain of events leading up to the firings of the five men began when a supervisor unsuccessfully urged two of the white guards to report falsely that Beaufort had raped a resident. Beaufort, who was then obeying orders to patrol alone, was vulnerable to such a charge because he would have had no witnesses to back up his denial.

The Island NAACP has contested McCoy's firing at the Human Rights Commission and the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. Both agencies have ruled against McCoy on the ground that he signed the agreement.

The NAACP is now appealing both decisions in U.S. District Court.

Officials at Willowbrook dispute Felton's version of how McCoy lost his job and have promised to give their side of the story later.