

Editorial page _____

Our opinion

Too slow at Willowbrook

One of the country's acknowledged experts in education for the mentally deficient, Dr. Burton Blatt, testified the other day that although he found less crowding and fewer of the residents unclothed, there was little difference between dormitory life at Willowbrook Developmental Center two weeks ago and the way it was when he first visited Willowbrook nine years ago.

He said that he saw one of the state's charges "banging his head against a wall and an attendant, not more than 15 feet away, didn't do anything to stop him."

His testimony was part of that in a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society against the state in behalf of the State Association for Retarded Children.

But once again it was an indictment of the state's system of primarily housing the retarded rather than working to rehabilitate them. As Dr. Blatt said, he sees no opportunity there for the residents to model themselves after anyone.

He urged that a board of "outside experts" develop plans for evacuation of Willowbrook and placement of residents in the community.

We assume, of course, that he was talking about placement in communities throughout the area served by Willowbrook, preferably where the state's charges would be more likely to be visited by their own families than they are now.

In any event, there certainly is a need for an entirely new study of what's best for the retarded to replace the present system of just putting them out of sight.