

Willowbrook hearing put off

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Hearings in Brooklyn Federal Court concerning living conditions at Willowbrook Developmental Center has been adjourned until Dec. 9, it was learned yesterday.

The reason for the adjournment apparently is that an out-of-court agreement between the defendants, including the state, and the plaintiffs, the New York State Association for Retarded Children and others is being negotiated.

Bruce Ennis, counsel for the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society, bringing the class action suit for the plaintiffs, refused to say anything about the prospect of a negotiated settlement.

"I do not think it is appropriate to comment on that at this time," Ennis said.

Assistant Attorney General George Mantzoros, chief defense counsel, refused comment late yesterday. He

said that any discussion about the case would have to come from the attorney general's public relations office.

No one could be reached yesterday in the public relations office.

It was learned that the adjournment came at the request of the attorney general, who was scheduled to begin defense of the state's action at Willowbrook on Monday before Judge Orrin G. Judd.

Judge Judd, according to Ennis, has been kept fully informed of everything the parties in the case have done and are doing.

When asked if an agreement has already been reached between the parties, Ennis again replied that "it would not be appropriate to comment."

One source close to the case said negotiations were at a "delicate" stage.

Ennis would not concede that negotiations were proceeding.

However, he said that throughout the litigation over the past two and one-half years the plaintiffs have expressed interest to sit down and see if there were areas of agreement that could be reached without resort to litigation.

Testimony thus far in the case has revealed conditions at Willowbrook that have included mice and roaches infesting buildings and food; maggots infesting wounds on the bodies of patients; employees with severe drug problems, and general conditions that, one witness said, cause "irreparable harm" to residents.

The explosive court testimony has proceeded while Willowbrook's former director Dr. Miodrag Ristich, was transferred from his post and while James Forde, a management specialist, has taken over on an interim basis.

Sources indicated that no public statement on the expected negotiated settlement of the case would come for at least a week.