

Willowbrook parents, state in agreement

By ROBERT MIRALDI

A lengthy, written, out-of-court agreement between the state Department of Mental Hygiene and groups demanding changes at Willowbrook Developmental Center has been completed, it was learned yesterday.

Probably some time this week the attorney general's office, which is defending the state, will sign the document, which

would mandate "immediate relief" for Willowbrook's 2,000 residents.

The signing of the document would bring an end to the class action suit that the New York State Association for Retarded Children and others had instituted. The trial, before Brooklyn Federal Court Judge Orrin G. Judd, is now more than two years old.

The trial was scheduled to resume today but was ad-

journalized last week at the request of the Attorney General's office until Dec. 9.

The purpose of the suit has been to force the state to eradicate what the court has labeled "shocking and inhumane" conditions at Willowbrook.

In recent months, court testimony revealed that conditions at Willowbrook had improved little in the past few years. Some witnesses told of

mice in food supplies, maggots infecting wounds and employes with severe drug problems.

James A. Forde, acting director, admitted last week that Willowbrook was being clobbered in the courts.

Yesterday, at a meeting of the Willowbrook Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, at which president Tony Pinto revealed to the 100 parents the existence of the out-of-court agreement, the talk was of

gruesome events similar to those revealed in courts.

Pinto told the group that the court order "when it is signed," would bring "immediate relief." The plaintiffs, he said, "feel that the settlement would be over and above what the court could mandate."

The parents, however, seemed little concerned with the out-of-court agreement. They asked no questions about the provisions, even though Pinto had a copy

of the agreement with him. Pinto would not make public the details of the agreement.

The parents, in boisterous demonstrative, pleading fashion, demanded solutions to Willowbrook's problems. They told of the afflictions that beset the residents because, they claim, of neglect.

One man said his 13-year-old son, who he said was a spastic, weighed less than 30 pounds because the center's employes

refused to chop his food. Instead, he said, they gave him starch-like mashed potatoes — daily.

"They give him the same garbage day in and day out," he said. "When I inquired, they say, mind your own business."

The man said his son went into a coma recently and it went undiscovered for two days. The boy is in a hospital

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now, he said. "But I almost lost him."

An elderly man, who said his son resided at Willowbrook for eight years, claimed the children in one building "are starving to death; they're naked."

"They crawl on the floor for crumbs, he said.

His face contorted, hands outstretched, the man demanded: "Don't we have the legal right to give our children additional food?"

Moments after it had begun, the meeting was interrupted by three women and one man who were relatives of Jamie Rivera, an 8-year-old resident who died last month from a blow to the head received in an undetermined manner.

The relatives carried placards. "Our Jamie Rivera was mysteriously killed in Building 8," one sign read. "Yours could be next," read another.

Pinto said the court agreement would "minimize" recurrences of incidents like the Rivera death. He emphasized throughout the two and one half hour meeting that "the only way we can resolve" Willowbrook's problems "is for the parents to be alert."

"This meeting won't resolve anything unless we constantly come here. Come here at meal time," he urged the parents.

Pinto said the acting director Forde had shown "a great interest, great desire to cooperate." Forde was "off to a good start," he said, "more responsible to the requests of parents."