

# Willowbrook 'cease-fire' proposed

By JOHN T. CRUDELE

Lawrence C. Kolb, sworn in yesterday as commissioner of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, in his first official remarks, has called for a respite from criticism of institutions such as the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

After being sworn in by Secretary of State Mario Cuomo, Kolb explained that the constant criticism received by Willowbrook has demoralized the institution's staff and has caused difficulty in keeping employes in their positions.

Kolb noted that Willowbrook has had a 35 per cent personnel turnover each year and that this figure would probably rise if the criticism continued.

In effect, the new commissioner called for a cease-fire, an act which he hopes will enable the institution and others like it around the state to put themselves back together.

"I would hope," he said, "that this staff and others might be left peacefully for a while to regroup and re-gather."

In referring to the Willowbrook situation specifically, Kolb said that he regrets the criticism and bad publicity given to all the mental hygiene facilities throughout the state.

James A. Forde, acting director of Willowbrook, agreed with the new commissioner's statements when contacted last night. The director admitted morale problems among his staff and noted that the difficulty was in a large part coming from the criticism leveled at the institution.

"I agree with Mr. Kolb. Obviously, I think that public exposure has been demoralizing

to our staff," Forde said.

Forde added that he was pleased with the appointment of Kolb as commissioner, citing the new department head's many years of experience in the field of mental hygiene.

In addition to Kolb being renowned in his field, Forde was pleased with the appointment "because of his activity in research, and he has also been responsible for a number of years for delivering mental health services to Washington Heights."

"Because of this he is familiar with both research and the mental health delivery system," the Willowbrook director continued.

Gov. Carey said at the swearing in ceremony that improvement of the mental hospitals was a top priority item with the new Albany administration. The ceremony took place in the Manhattan offices of the governor.

In another area of controversy in the field of mental health care, Commissioner Kolb said that he felt the policy of releasing mental patients into the community is "one of the great forward movements in the field."

"It may well be," he continued, "that there has been insufficient attention given on

occasion to the conditions of patients who are released."

Kolb, 63, has headed the psychiatry department of Columbia University medical school and was director of the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

The top state job in the mental health field pays \$51,150 a year.

Kolb replaces Dr. Alan D. Miller, who resigned Dec. 20 to become director of an Albany community health center and associate director of Albany Medical School.