

# Parents' unit raps state's 'unilateral' Willowbrook transfers

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

A spokesman for a major New York organization of parents with retarded children yesterday blasted the Department of Mental Hygiene for its announcement on Monday that 800 residents of the Willowbrook Developmental Center would be transferred to other state facilities during the next 18 months.

"This was a unilateral action—there was no consultation with any parent groups as far as I know," said Joseph T. Weingold, the executive director of the New York Institute for Retarded Children in Manhattan.

"And it's typical of the paternalistic attitude of the Department of Mental Hygiene," he declared. "The parents are never allowed to be partners in decisions like this."

Weingold went on to charge that the department has a tendency to think of retarded children as "baggage" that can be shuttled from one institution to another.

Weingold explained that he was not necessarily opposed to the transfers. But he said he would like to know who the 800 are, what "better programs are waiting for them, and whether the new facilities were prepared for the additional residents.

"You could empty Willowbrook and just create more problems elsewhere," he said.

Weingold also pointed out that, according to state law, a child cannot be moved in or

out of an institution unless the parents give their consent in the form of a signed release.

Weingold further charged that the Manhattan Developmental Center on Morton St., the destination of some of the Willowbrook transferees was a "shambles" and ought to be closed.

As alternatives, he proposed three institutions in upstate New York that, he said, cost \$100 million to build and were now empty. He named the Oswald Hek Developmental Center in Schenectady, the Broome County Developmental Center in Binghamton, and the Monroe Developmental Center in Rochester.

As possible reasons of these institutions, Weingold suggested Willowbrook children who never receive visitors and have apparently been abandoned by their families.

After the Monday announcement, Willowbrook officials explained that many of the 800 transferees would be placed in metropolitan area facilities so that the residents would be within visiting distance of their parents and relatives.

The new commissioner of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, Lawrence Kolb made the announcement about the transfers at a press conference just after touring Willowbrook Monday afternoon. At the time, officials said that many of the transferees would be going to the Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens developmental centers.

According to Weingold, the state drafted guidelines for parent involvement in large-scale decisions concerning mental institutions in 1972 following a general uproar over the hasty transfer of more than 1,000 residents out of Willowbrook.

But, Weingold said, the guidelines were recently "countermanded" by Samuel Ornstein, an associate commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene.

The New York Institute for Retarded Children is one of the groups that brought a class action suit against Willowbrook in 1972, charging that conditions at the mental institution violate the constitutional rights of the residents. The case is still pending in Brooklyn Federal Court.