

Gov Bows to Court, Agrees To Willowbrook Reforms

By EDWARD O'NEILL

Under pressure from a federal court, Gov. Carey signed an agreement yesterday to mandate sweeping reforms in the care of mentally retarded patients at the Willowbrook State School. The 3,000-bed institution will be turned into a 250-bed community home—for Staten Island residents only—within six years.

The improvements ordered for Willowbrook, which Carey said will be extended to all similar institutions throughout the state, will include:

- The establishment "within a 12-month period" of 200 new community centers in the New York area to handle patients moved out of Willowbrook.

- The hiring of 800 additional workers to provide one attendant for every four patients. Currently, the ratio is 1 to 9; at one time, the disparity was 1 to 60.

- The provision of dental services, eyeglasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs and other adaptive equipment. Also listed were "well-balanced, nutritionally adequate diets," "availability of toys, books and other materials," and a minimum of two hours of daily recreational activity (indoors and out), plus adequate clothing.

- In addition to educational programs, added medical help with physicians on duty 24 hours a day, "full-scale" immunization, and a contract with nearby hospitals to furnish "acute" medical care.

- The formation of three separate boards to make sure the state lives up to the agreement.

The Carey mental-health-program announcement took the form of his signature on a consent decree covering suits filed in Brooklyn U.S. District Court on March 17, 1972, by 17 parents and guardians of Willowbrook patients which charged "widespread physical abuse, inhumane and destructive conditions, severe overcrowding and understaffing, involuntary servitude of inmates, extended solitary confinement and an almost absence of therapeutic care."

The plaintiffs were represent-

ed by lawyers from the N.Y. Civil Liberties Union, the Legal Aid Society and the Mental Health Law Project; a representative of the Civil Rights division of the U.S. Justice Dept. also sat in as friend of the court.

In announcing the drastic re-vamping of mental-health services at Willowbrook, along with Dr. Lawrence Kolb, the Commissioner of Mental Hygiene, Carey declared, "The agreement we are announcing today ends three years of acrimony and legal confrontation over Willowbrook."

"This agreement will offer each mentally retarded person the opportunity to realize his or her potential and to lead as normal a life as possible. We can do no less."

The consent decree signed by Carey and the plaintiffs was delivered to Federal Judge Orrin D. Judd prior to the governor's announcement yesterday morning.

Judd must approve of the settlement before it becomes binding. However, due to the wide, sweeping reforms agreed to, it is expected the court's approval will be forthcoming.

Carey will face a tougher task in getting the Legislature to finance the \$16 million cost. The Legislature cut Carey's budget request for mental health from \$16.7 million to only \$5 million — an \$11.7 million slice — last month. The governor, armed with the new agreement on Willowbrook, will seek restoration of the cut in his upcoming supplemental budget.