

State Agrees to Transfer 2,650 Out of Willowbrook

By PETER KIHSS

Governor Carey announced an agreement yesterday to settle a three-year court fight over the state's Willowbrook Developmental Center for the mentally retarded. The agreement would reduce the number of patients at the facility—once overcrowded and depicted as a place of horror—from a current 2,900 to 250 in six years.

The plan would set up 200 community places for patients in the next 12 months — hostels, halfway houses, group homes, workshops, day-care training centers — in sites yet to be chosen. The moves would be part of a continuing effort to get away from oversized institutions.

Bruce J. Ennis, counsel for the New York Civil Liberties Union, said the agreement involving the center, which is on Staten Island, "recognizes that retarded persons are capable of physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth." He said it called for specific individualized programs to help each patient achieve his potential.

The 41-page agreement set

forth 23 sets of standards and services, the bulk to be achieved within 13 months. Among them were new staff ratios, such as one attendant to every four residents during waking hours in most cases, and one clinical-staff member for every three residents. This will require the hiring of 800 people by next March 31. The present staff number 3,800.

Willowbrook is to be reduced to 250 or fewer beds, to serve only Staten Islanders. The community residences to be developed are to be limited to 15 beds for mildly retarded adults and 10 for others. The Mental Hygiene Commissioner, Dr. Lawrence C. Kolb, said no plan had yet been decided for the disposal of surplus Willowbrook buildings or property.

Governor Carey said he would demand that the State Legislature restore \$11-million it had cut from Mental Hygiene Department operating funds so that a start on implementing the agreement could be made. He said the proposals were to be extended eventually to all 20,000 retarded people now in institutions throughout the state.

Willowbrook has been the target of a Federal Court suit in Brooklyn since March 17, 1972. The New York State Association for Retarded Children, its Willowbrook chapter and the parents or guardians of 17 residents are demanding the closing of the center or at least sweeping reforms.

Judge Orrin G. Judd, in an interim order on April 10, 1973, ordered the state to remedy "inhumane and shocking conditions," in part by hiring more staff members, including one ward attendant for every nine residents.