

Union chief backs off on charges

The president of the Civil Service Employees Association union representing the 3,862 employes of Willowbrook Developmental Center yesterday refuted earlier charges by a union official that the center's director was covering up for "friends."

Ronnie Smith, president of Local 429, said that Felton King, vice president of the union, was not speaking for the union when he charged Acting Director Dr. Stanley Slawinski with covering up after the death of a resident last week.

King had said that the unit chief and team leader of the building where Luis Ramirez, 20, resided, were aware that the profoundly retarded youth was missing for four days before he was found—frozen—last Monday morning.

Slawinski suspended four low-level employes; but, King said, top-level employes were also responsible. At issue was whether administration officials were aware of Ramirez's disappearance and delayed in instituting a full-scale search.

"Lack of established well-defined procedures and the resultant lack of followup by key supervisors, such as team leaders and chiefs of services,

may have contributed to the delay," Smith said yesterday in a statement.

Ramirez was reported missing Christmas Eve, but a search was not begun until Sunday afternoon.

Smith rapped the suspension of the four employes. "They did their jobs to the degree they were able. They followed those procedures commonly in practice," Smith said.

"The decision to suspend employes was made before any investigation was made at Willowbrook," Smith charged. He added that the Willowbrook administration was more concerned with "a good public image" than with developing "adequate policies and procedures."

A union spokesman said that a grievance order over the suspension will be filed with the American Arbitration Association.

Slawinski had called the King charges "vicious and unfounded" and said that the union would have to live by its charges. Slawinski said yesterday that Smith had called to apologize for, although not retract, King's charges.

No arrests were made or expected in the death of Ramirez.

— ROBERT MIRALDI