

# Assemblywoman Connelly to probe Willowbrook death

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN  
Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly yesterday announced plans to hold hearings in Albany on the death of Luis Ramirez, a resident of Willowbrook Developmental Center whose frozen body was found on the mental institution's grounds Dec. 29.

"I have the power of subpoena and I intend to use it," said Mrs. Connelly, who heads an Assembly task force studying ways to reorganize the Department of Mental Hygiene.

The legislator explained that the hearings would be held before the full Committee on Mental Health and Retardation, of which her task force is a sub-committee. She said she would meet Monday with chairman James McCabe, a Democrat from Binghamton, to set a date for the inquiry.

"It will probably be within the next two weeks," Mrs. Connelly added.

The 20-year-old Ramirez was discovered missing from his ward on Christmas Eve, but a search party was not called out to look for him until Dec. 28. Dr. Stanley Slawinski, acting director of Willowbrook, has suspended four employees at the facility for not notifying the institution's administration and security police immediately after the youth's disappearance.

Among those to be subpoenaed, Mrs. Connelly said, are Slawinski, a number

of Willowbrook employees, and a variety of officials from the Department of Mental Hygiene, including Commissioner Lawrence Kolb.

Mrs. Connelly said the hearings would focus on the circumstances surrounding Ramirez's death. She remarked that, judging from what she had been told during interviews at Willowbrook recently, "there is a distinct possibility that this could happen again."

The inquiry will also investigate the quality of care at Willowbrook in the wake of last year's federal consent judgment ordering the Department of Mental Hygiene to upgrade service and improve the staff at the mental facility, according to the assemblywoman. She said she was particularly disturbed by the fact that in some cases it is the low-paid employees who are charged with the most responsibility in the care of residents at Wil-

lowbrook.

In addition, Mrs. Connelly said, the inquiry will probe the charge that Slawinski, during his investigation of Ramirez's death, accused only rank and file employees with negligence while ignoring the role of high-ranking personnel.

Among others, the charge was made by Edgar Smith, a former recreation instructor at Willowbrook who claims to be involved in organizing black and Puerto Rican em-

ployees at Willowbrook. Smith said Dec. 31, the day after Ramirez's body was found, that Slawinski is attempting to blame "those least responsible."

In a related development yesterday, two members of the black and Puerto Rican Caucus in the Legislature, Arther Eve and Edward Griffith, flew from Buffalo to visit Willowbrook. The toured some of the buildings at the facility, talked to the employees and

had an interview with Slawinski.

Slawinski, who is filling in for ailing director Harold C. Piepenbrink, has refused to name the four suspended employees pending a private hearing on the Ramirez incident next week at Willowbrook.

Assemblyman McCabe, speaking through a spokesman from Albany, said Mrs. Connelly would preside as chairman of his committee during the inquiry.