



Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, foreground, listens as Dr. Stanley Slawinski, deputy director at Willowbrook, testifies about the death of Louis Ramirez.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

Hearing into mental patient's death sparks few questions, fewer answers

By ROBERT MIRALDI

A State Assembly mental health committee heard over three hours of testimony yesterday, but little new evidence emerged about the death of 20-year-old Luis Ramirez, the Willowbrook Developmental Center resident found Dec. 29 frozen on the grounds.

The hearing had been convened by Staten Island Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, who said the committee didn't want a "trial" but wanted to bring out the facts about the death of Ramirez, who wandered away from Wil-

lowbrook on Christmas Eve and was not looked for until five days later.

About 100 spectators and 13 witnesses gathered in the Staten Island Community College auditorium to hear Willowbrook officials explain how Ramirez could have been missing for five days before top-level officials became aware of his disappearance.

"There should be some squirming administrators up there," said one Island mental health official before the hearing.

There was little squirming,

however, and few tough questions put to Dr. Stanley Slawinski, acting director when Ramirez died, or to Dr. Alvin Mesnikoff, regional director for the State Department of Mental Hygiene.

"We all feel that Willowbrook needs a boost and doesn't need a further bad name," Mrs. Connelly said at one point in the hearing.

Last night the Island Democrat said she was "uncomfortable" about yesterday's testimony. Many questions, she said, were not answered. Head on...they skirted

around the issues.

"If you're a chief, you have to take responsibility," she said. "You have to accept the blame."

The death of Ramirez could have been avoided "for a variety of reasons," Mrs. Connelly said, adding that it could happen again and that "fortunes are being put into the Willowbrook staff but that none of it seems to be filtering into the wards."

Yesterday's hearing provided "some good ammunition," Mrs. Connelly said, for the As-

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