

Editorial page

Our Opinion

Adequate care for Willowbrook

The announcement that a \$2 million appropriation in the state's supplemental budget will add 900 more employes to the staff of Willowbrook Developmental Center comes as no surprise. The staff of this facility for care of the mentally retarded has been woefully inadequate for many years.

Four years ago, groups representing parents of the center's residents began a legal fight to get conditions there improved. A federal court ordered the center to increase its staff by 800, provided there was considerable transfer of patients to other facilities or in-community residence.

Only last month the Willowbrook Review Panel reportedly said staff additions and other changes ordered by the court had been "almost nil," and the parent groups were threatening to seek contempt of court citations against prime officials of the state's Department of Mental Hygiene.

Last month, too, officials admitted that far less than the staffing ordered and very few of the environmental changes decreed had been put into effect. There were still at the beginning of last month 200 people resident at the center who were supposed to have been placed in communities.

The action on the supplemental budget came a little over three weeks before a hearing scheduled for July 23 by Federal Judge Orrin C. Judd to find out how many of the changes ordered have been complied with. So there's no doubt at all that it was primarily this pressure which resulted in the additional appropriation.

State Sen. John J. Marchi said the population of 2,600 at Willowbrook is expected to drop to a level of 1,900 by the end of 1976. We sincerely hope so. There was no decline at all to speak of in the past six months.

The money will mean a higher ratio of staff to patients, and it should also provide the special psychiatric care that some of the patients need but have been deprived of in recent months.