

# Panel finds Willowbrook lags on court-ordered reform

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Willowbrook Developmental Center has made "limited progress" over the last six months, but it is still beset by serious staff, management, environment and programming problems.

Furthermore, says the Willowbrook Review Panel in its second six-month report to a federal court, many of the 2,600 retarded persons living at the center "are still languishing on the wards."

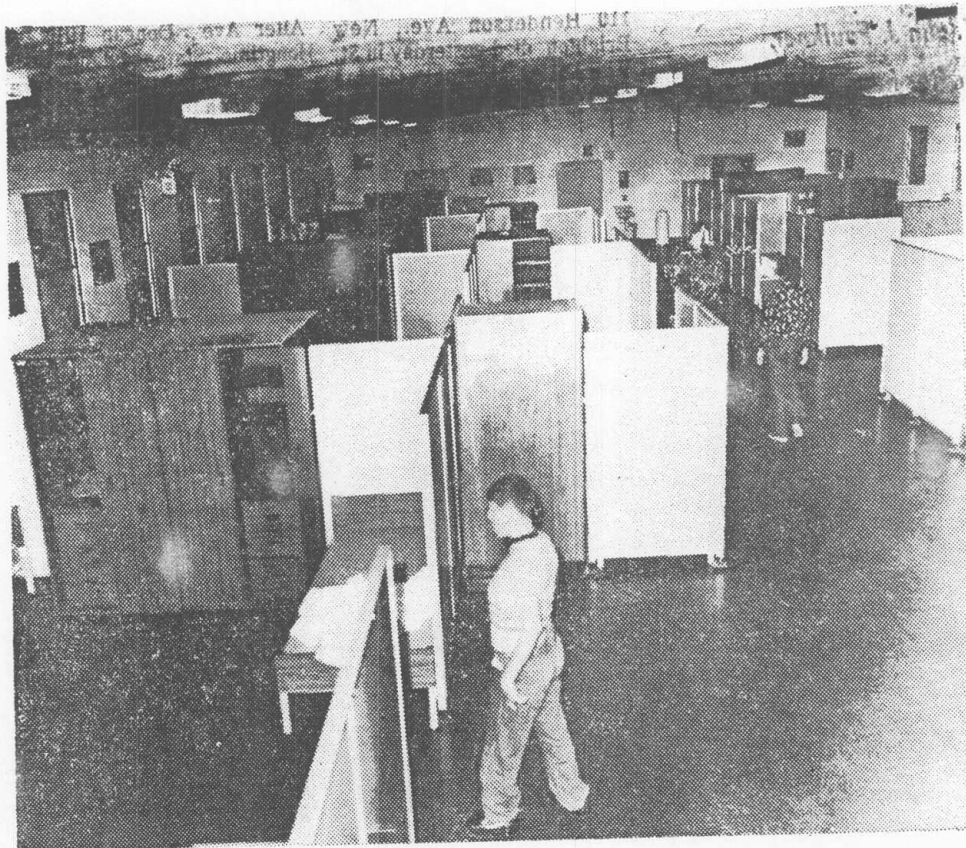
"The vast majority of Willowbrook residents still sleep in large open wards and are afforded little privacy or other elements of a normalized or home-like atmosphere," the 252-page report says.

Based on audits conducted at the center over the last two months, the independent court-appointed Review Panel found that 12 and 13-month deadlines imposed by the court "have not been met with regard to most of the requirements" of a consent decree signed in April 1975 by Gov. Carey.

The deadlines were to be the object of a July 23 contempt proceeding in U.S. District Court, Brooklyn. Attorneys for parents' groups have been considering seeking jail sentences or fines against top state officials, including Gov. Carey, to speed up change at the long-troubled Willowbrook.

However, the death last Thursday of the judge in the case, Orrin G. Judd, has put off indefinitely the July 23 hearing. No decision will be made on the eventual disposition of the case until after tomorrow.

Thomas A. Coughlin, acting Willowbrook director and a deputy commissioner for the state Department of Mental Hygiene, said yesterday that the Review Panel report is a "fair presentation of where we stand."



Some wards in Willowbrook Developmental Center have been compartmentalized to afford residents a little privacy.

"As a general statement," Coughlin said, "it's a question of speed. We've not moved as quickly as we should have, although I'm not saying we could have moved quicker."

Coughlin pointed to understaffing as the biggest continuing problem at Willowbrook, which has 4,300 employees and a budget authorization to hire an additional 500 staffers.

The Review Panel report documents the understaffing. In 90 per cent of the buildings sampled, the panel found "definite staff deficits." In the other 10 per cent, mandated staff ratios were "questionable," the panel found.

In one building, the panel found a 47 per cent overall

deficit. "The inescapable conclusion is that the staffing deficits continue to be most active at the times most residents are present on the wards and few, if any, clinical staff are available for programs or structured activities."

Historically, staff deficits, training and turnover (about 30 per cent) have been major problems at Willowbrook. The result, observers point out, is uneven care, unprepared staff and a poor delivery of services.

According to Coughlin, part of the staffing problem has been caused by a mixup in projected population at Willowbrook. Transfers of resi-