

Carey: No more mistakes like Willowbrook

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Gov. Carey announced plans yesterday that will insure the flow of federal money into state mental hygiene facilities and will halve the number of retarded persons living in state developmental centers to 10,000.

The plans, announced by Carey on a visit to the Broome Developmental Center in Binghamton, reinforce the state's commitment to develop a system of locally sponsored residential and treatment programs.

"We will not perpetuate the mistakes of the past in this important area," Carey said.

Among the mistakes, of course, has been the Willowbrook Developmental Center where, in 1972, 6,000 retarded persons lived in overcrowded conditions and parents were forced to go into federal court to get relief.

The attempt to improve conditions prompted a four-year court battle which ended in April 1975 when Carey signed a consent judgment which outlined radical changes at Willowbrook, including the placement of residents into community facilities and a reduction of the center's population to 250 by 1981. The population now is about 2,600.

The state Department of Mental Hygiene was to have met many of the demands of the consent judgment by June. It didn't, but if it had, it also would have met most of the federal standards which govern intermediate care facilities for the mentally retarded (ICF/MR).

The plan announced yesterday "outlines our commitment to develop the framework which will allow every mentally retarded citizen to realize his or her maximum potential," Carey said.

It also allows the state to continue to receive about \$125

million in federal money for its 21 centers. In 1974 Willowbrook received \$15 million in federal Medicare money.

Carey related his ICF/MR compliance proposal directly to the Willowbrook decree which, he said, will be extended to every person in a state developmental center.

"At the same time," Carey said of his proposal, "it provides the means to accelerate the development of community-based residential and habilitation programs."

The proposal by Carey has not yet been approved by the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare, but one Department of Mental Hygiene source said yesterday, "We would be quite surprised if it was not approved."

Carey's plan as outlined yesterday includes:

□ Five-year placement goals to return nearly 9,000 retarded persons to their home communities and reduce the population of state centers from 20,000 beds to 10,500.

□ The hiring of 1,300 new employees at state centers this year, a "rather paltry" number, one source said.

□ Doubling of the number of retarded persons in family care from 3,700 to nearly 8,000 over five years.

□ An increase in hostel placements from the present 1,100 to more than 7,000, with 60 group homes planned for this year.

□ Increased use of health-related facilities and nursing homes, with a total of about 1,500 placements over five years.

Originally, compliance with federal ICF/MR regulations was to have been completed by March 1977. "It became quite clear early in 1975 that New York and most other states would not be able to meet those deadlines," Robert

Norris, ICF/MR coordinator for the state, said yesterday.

The state agreed to the regulations in 1974 and estimated then that about \$20 million in renovation would be necessary. That figure rose to \$60 million by 1975 and "it seemed stupid to invest in big old buildings that would be phased out anyway," Norris said.

The state instead adopted a "common sense" approach, Norris said, and decided that it would renovate those buildings at state centers which will remain for long-term use. Statewide that means about 10,500 beds and about 250 at Willowbrook, where the pediatric complex has been renovated and will be the future permanent Willowbrook residence.

A Health Department survey at Willowbrook last year found over 30 major violations that would violate the ICF/MR regulations. Norris says that statewide violations like those found at Willowbrook could cost \$100 million.

Carey's plan clearly puts the emphasis on the development of community residences and programs. "It is our firm belief—both in terms of fiscal economy and from a philosophical viewpoint—that it is more beneficial to invest funds in community alternatives rather than to renovate old residential structures."

Dr. Jennifer Howse, director of the Willowbrook Review Panel, seconded the Carey statement. "It puts the emphasis on the community, where it should be," Dr. Howse said.

In a related development, Carey announced yesterday the appointment of Mrs. Jean Kennedy Smith as chairman of the newly created Council for Mental Hygiene Planning, which will formulate statewide goals for the Department of Mental Hygiene.