

## Editorial page

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### Our opinion

# Willowbrook safety a must

In the latest incident of psychotic violence at Willowbrook Developmental Center a woman staff physician was attacked by an 18-year-old female resident of the center. The doctor had to be rushed to St. Vincent's Medical Center for treatment of a six-inch gash on her head.

This was the 44th incident involving that resident in less than four months. Until the end of April, she had been housed in a special isolation psychiatric ward at Willowbrook. But for some inexplicable reason the state Mental Hygiene Department decreed that the ward be closed and its patients transferred to other buildings, permitted to mingle and molest people with far fewer behavior problems and staff members as well.

"The issue is the need to develop special kinds of programs," Dr. Alvin Mesnikoff, regional director of the department, said after the attack. "Clearly, Willowbrook should have the capacity to deal with such disruptive patients."

Well, didn't it have that capacity before that special ward was shut down?

Why isn't it being reopened? The Willowbrook Benevolent Society, a parents' association, expressed its outrage at the closing months ago. And a \$2 million appropriation in the state's supplemental budget voted by the Legislature in June provides for the addition of 900 more employes to Willowbrook's staff. Certainly this special need requires special and speedy attention.

The retarded people at this center have the right to adequate care and protection. So does the staff. The state has been far too lax in meeting this obligation.