

Our opinion

Willowbrook action in sight

Federal Court Judge John R. Bartels has agreed to postpone a contempt of court trial scheduled for Tuesday against top officials of the state Department of Mental Hygiene for not implementing changes decreed at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

In court Wednesday, one of the defendants, Deputy Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin, said that although the state is spending from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per resident at Willowbrook, there are at least eight other state facilities that provide better care than Willowbrook does.

The judge said that the state certainly isn't breaking any records to

implement court-ordered changes. We agree with His Honor. Apparently, too, the fact that the state is having difficulties in finding a new medical director for the center, and the reason is obvious — criticism of the lack of proper care for the residents there and foot-dragging on improvements certainly would make a doctor worry about taking such a job.

Judge Bartels said he would sign an order allowing the state to increase the medical director's salary from \$38,000 to to \$48,000. That may be some inducement, but the sad history of this facility for the mentally retarded and previous directors is the big problem.

The state has been talking about upgrading care for several years, and it has added more employees to Willowbrook's staff. But promises that the population of almost 2,600 residents would be cut by several hundred this year haven't been kept, and problems with retarded people in the facility who have psychiatric tendencies have been growing since they are no longer given separate care.

The families of Willowbrook residents had no alternative but to take their grievances to Federal Court, and it does look as though there will be results in the judge's rulings. We hope so, that officialdom will get over its own retarded attitude on what's needed.