

Cerebral Palsy Group Will Run Part of the Willowbrook Facility

By MAX H. SEIGEL

United Cerebral Palsy of New York will take over the management of a fifth of the Willowbrook Developmental Center for the mentally retarded on Staten Island, under an agreement signed yesterday in Federal District Court in Brooklyn.

"This would be the first operation of a state facility by a private organization," said Barbara Blum, the assistant state commissioner of mental hygiene. "It's a kind of pilot project, and if it works out, United Cerebral Palsy will take over the management of the rest of Willowbrook."

A spokesman for Governor Carey said the new Willowbrook arrangement raised the possibility of having private nonprofit organizations reimbursed by the state to manage other state facilities as well. "But we'll have to wait to see if that's feasible," he said.

Commissioner Blum said the operation of five buildings at Willowbrook by United Cerebral Palsy would be studied for both "benefits and problems." She added that no cutoff date was contemplated in the contract to be signed with the private agency and that she assumed it would continue through May 1, 1981, the target date for getting the population of the facility down to 250 residents—all from Staten Island.

In 1972, when Willowbrook housed more than 5,300 mentally retarded persons, parents and civil-liberties lawyers filed suit against the state, charging it was operating "a place of horror where people deteriorated both mentally and physically." A consent agreement, signed in April 1975, stipulated that the population be reduced gradually to 250 by 1981 and that services for residents be improved radically.

Contempt Citation Sought

Because the state did not meet the timetable set up in the consent agreement, the parents and lawyers for the residents moved to have state officials cited for contempt. This charge is still pending.

Asked yesterday why she thought United Cerebral Palsy could do a better job than the state has been able to do, Commissioner Blum said it was a question of getting "professionally trained persons in physical therapy."

The state, she added, is not competitive with private organizations, because of its fixed pay scale and other Civil Service restrictions. "We have trouble in government attracting the professional persons we need at Willowbrook," she said. "United Cerebral Palsy is perceived as

a professional organization that is more attractive."

Commissioner Blum also pointed to United Cerebral Palsy's successful operation of Nina Eaton, a home for 60 mentally retarded adults at South Beach on Staten Island.

The agreement signed yesterday and approved by Judge John R. Bartels as "a step forward," calls for efforts to complete a contract with United Cerebral Palsy by July 1, and for the private agency to move in as soon afterward as possible.

Under the agreement, United Cerebral Palsy will be given full operational authority over five of the 27 buildings at Willowbrook, housing 500 of its 2,500 residents—all between the ages of 10 and 17. United Cerebral Palsy will have the authority to hire full staffs for some of the buildings and to operate the others by providing supervisors for present staff members.

In addition, the contract is to be expanded to cover other buildings in the huge complex if the operation of the five original buildings proves successful. And it is to include the speedy negotiation of another contract with United Cerebral Palsy for the operation of miniteams of training personnel at the Gouverneur Division of Manhattan Development Center.

Policy on Present Personnel

Commissioner Blum emphasized that present personnel at Willowbrook would be allowed to volunteer for work under United Cerebral Palsy management. Those who do not, or are not accepted, will be transferred to other state facilities.

Robert Schonhorn, executive director of United Cerebral Palsy, said his organization's board of directors had approved the Willowbrook project. But he made it clear there would be some hard negotiations before any contract was signed.

"I have not agreed to operate with their staff," he said. "Unless I have full authority, we can't operate."

Mr. Schonhorn also said he wanted to assure adequate financing for all Willowbrook residents placed in the community—the area run by his organization. "I want the \$72 a day spent at Willowbrook to follow the residents into the community. I'll lower my costs, but I don't want money to go back to the state's coffers."

The United Cerebral Palsy director said he would make these points at a negotiating session he will hold with Commissioner Blum today.