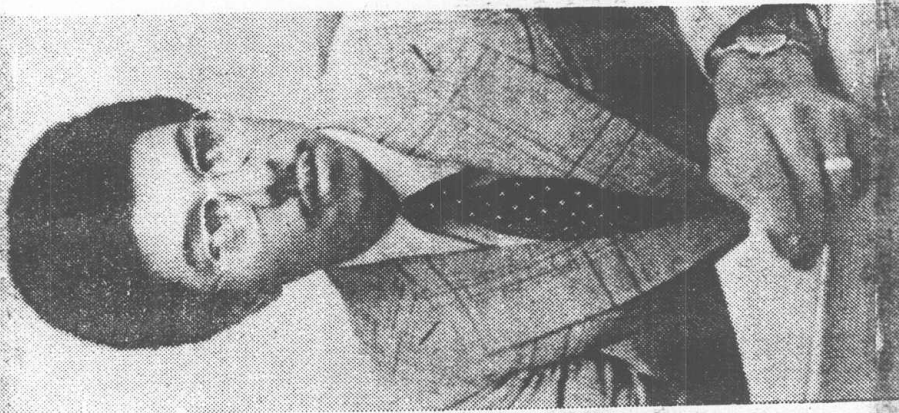


Willowbrook boss asks job transfer



Dr. Levester Cannon, director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, asks for a transfer to another job in the state mental hygiene system.

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Willowbrook Developmental Center, the troubled state institution for the retarded, may soon lose another director — its fifth in less than three years.

Dr. Levester Cannon, the Schenectady, N.Y., educator who has directed the 2,500-bed facility for 10 months, has asked for a transfer to another job in the state's mental hygiene bureaucracy.

In response to questions yesterday, Cannon said he had discussed with officials in Albany the possibility of a transfer to another job in the state mental hygiene system and he said he had inquired if his holding the Willowbrook job would bar his transfer. He was told it wouldn't.

Cannon said yesterday he was "open minded" about staying at Willowbrook or going elsewhere. Calling the Willowbrook job "difficult at best,"

brook job "very difficult," Cannon said the facility "doesn't lend itself to a director being able to be in complete charge."

Cannon cited the numerous advisory and "vested interest" groups, like the unions and parents, with which he has to deal to make decisions.

Although Cannon declined to discuss aspects of his relationship with mental hygiene officials in Albany, numerous sources have said that Cannon has expressed displeasure with his inability to make key decisions about the management of Willowbrook.

Despite being the day-to-day director of the 387-acre center, Cannon reportedly has had to defer to Deputy Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin on many major decisions. One source called their relationship "difficult at best."

When Cannon took the \$43,500-a-year

job on July 15, vowing he would be at Willowbrook "till the job is done," he asserted to a reporter and to parent groups that he would not be a "puppet" for Coughlin. "I'm no one's puppet," Cannon said.

"The way it has turned out," one source intimately familiar with Willowbrook's operation said, Cannon "has had to take much of the daily abuse, much of the blame and yet he hasn't been able to make decisions."

Rumors about Cannon's departure have been floating around Willowbrook for almost two months, but Cannon denied last month that he had any intention of leaving. He conceded that changes were going slowly and pointed out with a sigh that Willowbrook "is