

200 in Albany threaten some action

ALBANY, N.Y. (UPI) — About 200 employees of the Willowbrook Developmental Center on Staten Island Wednesday protested against a plan to turn over the care of 700 Willowbrook patients to the United Cerebral Palsy organization.

At a rally on the Capitol steps, followed by a march to the headquarters of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, the workers threatened a "sick-out" or "lock-in" at the center for the mentally retarded if the plan is carried out.

The employees, members of Local 429, the Civil Service Employees Association, accused Gov. Hugh Carey of "using a charitable organization to perform the function of state government." They also warned that patient care would suffer.

Under the experimental arrangement with the state, Cerebral Palsy is scheduled to take over care in seven buildings at the facility, which the CSEA claims will eliminate 700 state jobs by the end of the year. Within 18 months, another 600 state jobs will probably be lost, according to the CSEA.

CSEA President William McGowan warned in a statement, "UCP is simply not prepared for that responsibility and those patients will suffer because the level of professional service they will receive from UCP personnel is light-years below services now being performed by Department of Mental Hygiene employees."

The union claimed that handing over part of the patient load to the UCP would cost the state \$26,000 per patient, approximately three times the current cost per patient. However, a CSEA spokesman said the state had signed the agreement because federal funds are available to cover the additional cost.

The CSEA has filed a challenge to the plan in state Supreme Court.

Last week Willowbrook employees demonstrated in front of the United Cerebral Palsy headquarters in Manhattan and CSEA Local 429 President Felton King warned UCP "to stay the hell out of Willowbrook."

The Willowbrook facility has 4,500 state employees and approximately 4,000 patients being treated in 31 separate buildings.