

Our opinion

# Don't retard proper care

Anyone can understand the concern of people who have been employed at Willowbrook Developmental Center by the state about the prospect of transfers elsewhere and layoffs as a result of the court-ordered cutbacks in the institution's retarded population and the takeover of care in seven of Willowbrook's buildings by the United Cerebral Palsy Association. But isn't there also an obligation for them to be concerned about the people they're supposed to care for?

The prime reason for that takeover has been the dreadful revelations of conditions at the center a decade ago, the righteous determination of the parents of Willowbrook's retarded charges to demand improvements and resultant court decisions requiring more adequate care and eventual restoration of many of those residents to community living. There have been many charges that despite some improve-

ments care in recent years has been far from adequate.

State workers called in sick Thursday in larger than normal numbers despite the fact that it was pay day. It was also the first day of the court-invoked takeover of those seven buildings. As a result, the UCP employees, who had been expecting to have a two-day orientation session, had to fill in instead for the missing state employees. There were delays in providing meals and some residents apparently received improper diets.

The 641 residents of those seven buildings have a wide variety of physical and developmental disabilities, with two of the structures housing teen-agers and the other five younger children — Willowbrook's so-called "baby complex." The concern of employees of the state is that the complex represents the nucleus of Willowbrook's future.

But why can't the problems be worked out in a proper, humanitarian manner instead of stop-work actions which could degrade the care to what it was when the intolerable conditions were first exposed a decade ago?

United Cerebral Palsy officials say they are optimistic they can maintain proper care for the residents under that organization's supervision. That's what these handicapped people are entitled to, and a sizable amount of the UCP payroll is coming from federal funds, so that means the federal government will be keeping a careful watch as well.

The state employees' union still has two challenges pending in courts disputing the takeover's legality. But can they possibly aid their cause by staying off the job and showing a callous disregard for Willowbrook's charges?