

Judge to meet with Willowbrook officials on takeover

By BRUCE ALPERT

A meeting to try to resolve a dispute over the takeover of a portion of the Willowbrook Developmental Center by the United Cerebral Palsy Associations has been scheduled for Tuesday by the federal judge who approved the change in March.

Brooklyn District Court Judge John Bartels called on representatives of the Civil Service Employees Association, which has threatened to strike over the takeover, as well as state, parent and UCP representatives to meet with him in his chambers Tuesday at 10 a.m.

"The judge is concerned about the problems surrounding the takeover and wants everybody to come together in an effort to resolve the situation," a spokesman for Bartels said yesterday.

The dispute centers over union fears that the transfer of the responsibility for care of 641 of the institution's 2,500 residents from the state to UCP threatens the jobs of state employees. Although only 700 of the institution's 4,000 state workers are directly affected by the UCP takeover, Willowbrook CSEA President Felton King said that the Department of Mental Hygiene's decision to allow the takeover will lead to a steady decay of jobs for state employees.

The transfer of responsibility was approved by Bartels on March 11 as part of an agreement between state officials and parents groups, which have been pressing for court ordered reforms at the giant institution since 1972.

In addition to calling for UCP to take control of seven of Willowbrook's 31 buildings, the agreement included a state pledge to speed up the placement of Willowbrook residents into smaller community facilities.

The decision by Judge Bartels to meet with all of the parties in the dispute was praised by union officials who charged that they had not been consulted before the March agreement was reached.

"We are happy for the first time to have an opportunity to explain our position to Judge Bartels," said King. "I think we can show him that UCP is not equipped to take care of the residents."

King yesterday said that he would ask the judge to order that UCP be stripped of control of the seven buildings and that employees hired by the private organization be transferred to state control.

"There's no question that we are short in staff and could use the extra workers," said King. "But we cannot accept UCP control."

By changing the status of the recently hired workers from private to state, King said that those employees currently working for the state would have seniority over the UCP employees if layoffs were necessary in the future. "It's only fair that our workers not be the first to be fired if there are layoffs," said King.

King said that as a result of Bartels' willingness to meet with the union a threatened strike has been put off—at least until after the meeting. "If that meeting isn't successful then we will have to consider taking some kind of job action, including a possible strike," said the CSEA chapter president.

Both state and UCP officials said yesterday, however, that they will not give in to union demands that the private group's takeover of a portion of the institution be cancelled.

"We will continue to insist that the original plan for UCP remain in effect," said Atanas T. Kobryn, business manager at Willowbrook.