

## Willowbrook seeks funds for retraining

By BRUCE ALPERT

The Willowbrook Developmental Center and the union representing its 4,000 workers have agreed to seek state funding for a \$1.2 million employee training program to prepare 250 of the employees to work in community-based programs.

The proposed training program would enable some of the state employees to move along with Willowbrook's residents to community facilities for the mentally retarded as called for under a court decree. The decree calls for the institution's resident population, now estimated at 1,800, to be reduced to 250 by 1981.

"We believe that the state workers are best equipped to work with the retarded residents of this institution," Civil Service Employees Association President Felton King said. "And we believe that the state workers who have been doing the job all these years should be given the opportunity to continue their efforts."

King and other union officials fear massive layoffs as a result of the effort to depopulate Willowbrook, and state officials have done little to alleviate these fears, saying that only 400 to 500 civil servants will be employed at the 384-acre Staten Island institution in 1981.

Under the proposed training program, about 250 state workers — chosen by a combined union and administration screening committee — will receive 20 weeks of training by instructors from the College of Staten Island and Willowbrook's own staff. An application for funding the program is now before the state Department of Civil Service, which administers state employee training programs.

"Now we will find out if the state is serious about wanting to avoid layoffs," said Bart Brier, a field representative for the state CSEA. "It's a real opportunity to insure continued employment for state workers."

The proposal, which was agreed to by King and Willowbrook's acting director, Elin M. Howe, would enable workers to move into community-based facilities upon completion of the training program, according to union officials.

In addition to a desire to avert large numbers of layoffs, a spokesman for the state Department of Mental Hygiene said the program is a recognition that the private sector alone cannot provide the facilities and programs needed for the large numbers of Willowbrook residents moving into the community.

"We can't expect the private sector to provide all of the services," the spokesman said. "We're going to have to be ready to meet a good portion of that responsibility ourselves and this training program is a recognition of that."