

Wants to Change Willowbrook's Name

By MARY ENGELS

High on the list of New Yer's resolutions for Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly this year is to see the name of the Willowbrook Developmental Center changed to the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Mrs. Connelly, a Staten Islander who chairs the Committee on Mental Health and Retardation in the State Assembly, said, "I'm sick and tired of having Willowbrook spoken of in the same manner as Bedlam, England."

"I really feel we've turned a corner on the place. The population has shrunk from 6,000 a few years ago to about 2,500 now. And it must by law be down to 250 residents by 1981, so I do feel it's grossly unfair to continue to refer to it as a 'horror place.'"

"Besides being unfair to the residents and the people who work there, it is also unfair to the community," she said.

The assemblywoman noted the name change is already before the State Legislature. "It only remains to be passed."

The one measure that was passed last year, to the delight of Mrs. Connelly, was the act to amend the mental hygiene law in order to reorganize the Department of Mental Hygiene.

"The bill," said Mrs. Connelly, "broke down the large burdensome bureaucratic organization that was the Department of Mental Hygiene into three different offices: The Office of Mental Health, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse."

The assemblywoman noted that there "was so much Ping-Ponging between institutions as to who had responsibility for whom that much was being delayed."

"It's amazing, too, how many think that being mentally ill is being mentally retarded, and you have to keep saying they are two different things."

Mrs. Connelly also said there was just "too much duplication of services and money being wasted that led to the reorganization whereby each department would have a clear-cut idea of what is needed for his or her bailiwick."

The legislator also expressed concern for those in nursing homes or adult domiciliary care facilities who, she said, if given the choice would have preferred to stay in their own homes or apartments.

"Unfortunately, there is not enough money for home health care services, which in many cases would fill the bill for the elderly."

"It's another piece of legislature I would like to see passed — an expansion of home health care services under some kind of insurance plan rather than additional monies for nursing homes, which we have in abundance."

Mrs. Connelly stated that recently she had sent out a questionnaire to Islanders asking what they would most like to see done for the Island.

"Do you know the biggest response was from those who wish to see the elimination of the 8% sales tax? Apparently 85% of the Islanders who replied shop in New Jersey, where there is no tax at all."

An added footnote was that Islanders didn't think that Mayor Beame or Gov. Carey were doing right by us. "Or anyone in the state, for that matter."



Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly wants a new name and a new image for Willowbrook.