

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, Tuesday, March 14, 1978

## Parent group opposes Willowbrook renaming

Parent group representatives of Willowbrook Developmental Center's mentally retarded residents are rejecting the notion that by changing the institution's name, the state will erase the center's well-documented history of abuse and neglect.

In a telegram to Gov. Carey, Willowbrook Benevolent Society officials have urged the governor to veto legislation calling for Willowbrook to be renamed the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Such a change, said Genevieve Camen, the society's president, is merely cosmetic and cannot wipe away "the scars my son and dozens of other retarded children bear" as a result of past conditions at Willowbrook.

Mrs. Camen said that while Willowbrook's new administration, under the

leadership of director Elin M. Howe, "is the first one ever" trying to implement changes at the institution as called for by a 1975 court order, "there is still much work still to be done."

When the provisions of the consent decree are fulfilled, Mrs. Camen added, and the state Department of Mental Hygiene reduces Willowbrook to a 250-bed Staten Island facility as promised, "then we'll be able to change the name," she said.

The change-of-name bill, passed overwhelmingly by the Legislature and awaiting only the signature of Gov. Carey, was introduced by Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly and co-sponsored by State Sen. John J. Marchi.

The purpose of the new designation, according to the legislators, is to give the institution a fresh start and to help erase the stigma of the center's past.

But Mrs. Camen, saying she spoke for other parents of retarded children, claimed that her 31-year-old son had to be taken out of Willowbrook more than a year ago "because of unsafe conditions."

"How can I forget that," she asked.

"We've already had Willowbrook's name changed once," Mrs. Camen asserted, "from Willowbrook State School to Willowbrook Developmental Center but that didn't result in better care."

A spokesman for Gov. Carey refused yesterday to say if the bill would be signed into law, but added that parent opposition would be weighed in the governor's decision.

The Department of Mental Hygiene, estimating the cost of the name change as miniscule, supports the legislation.