

Court orders better staffing of Willowbrook panel

A federal court in Brooklyn ruled yesterday that the state should hire five full-time employees as additional staff for a committee that investigates alleged inhumane practices at the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

U.S. District Judge John R. Bartels, in a 22-page decision, called for the further staffing of the Consumer Advisory Board, which, he said, was needed to fulfill court-mandated change at the 1,600-bed institution for the retarded.

The consumer board, Bartels said,

evaluates alleged dehumanizing practices and also acts as watchdog for residents abandoned by friend, parent or guardian.

The unit needs four full-time professionals and a secretary to complement the three staff already hired so that the group does not fall behind in its work, Bartels ruled.

The court held that state officials, who opposed the motion for additional personnel, must submit appropriate budget requests to the Legislature to ensure the funding of the consumer board.