

## Willowbrook rights unit decides to disband

Members of Staten Island Developmental Center's Human Rights Committee have voted to disband, citing the institution's failure to set up an affirmative action program as required by law.

The decision to disband the seven-year-old group made up of Willowbrook employees came after members expressed dissatisfaction with appointments made by the newly created Staten Island Borough Developmental Services Office, which is to coordinate local services for the retarded.

According to Rabbi Philip Goldberg, a chaplain at Willowbrook who is co-chairman of the 15-member committee, members believed that qualified minority employees at the institution had been passed up for positions at the office without adequate explanation.

"The members were dissatisfied with the pace in which minority workers were being recruited for positions," Rabbi Goldberg said. "And they felt they had no choice but to disband."

Elin Howe, director of the 382-acre institution, conceded that Willowbrook still has not developed an affirmative action program, mandated for all large

employers by the federal government. But she said efforts were under way to improve opportunities for minorities and women at the institution and expressed hope that the committee would reconsider its decision to disband.

"We do definitely have imbalances of minorities and females in certain areas that we are trying to redress," Ms. Howe said. "But by disbanding the committee, they are forcing Willowbrook employees to take complaints to the state Division of Human Rights which will lengthen the period in which they can be resolved."

Ms. Howe, appointed director in January, said she did not know why the institution did not yet have an affirmative action plan, but said such a plan would be set implemented soon to spell out steps that should be taken to improve opportunities for upward mobility among Willowbrook employees.

"I am certainly committed to improve opportunities for employees," said Ms. Howe, who indicated that an affirmative action plan will spell out the departments that lack minority and woman staff members and what steps should be taken to correct the situation.

Rabbi Goldberg said that he was encouraged by Ms. Howe's response and indicated that he would call a meeting of the committee members to see if some agreement can be reached.

—BRUCE ALPERT