

At-home handicapped deserve equality

This is a letter I wrote to our State Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas J. Coughlin:

"I have just finished reading an article in our Staten Island Advance on the \$100-million spent to improve Willowbrook. It is very nice that our officials can spend so much time and money on an institution. On an institution which parents of mentally retarded children and adults created.

"I'm sorry to hear parents who dumped their children in Willowbrook still criticize all the fine help they are getting for their children. If they are so against the institution why not bring their children home? Let them go to schools for the retarded, which we have. The only thing Willowbrook patients are lacking is the absence of their parents and their love.

"Being a parent of a multiple handicapped child myself, I have been working hard for five years, joining parent groups and trying to get better facilities for our children who live at home. I dare the parents of Willowbrook patients to criticize something their children have and our children need.

"I understand they have one-to-one teaching for some of their patients in Willowbrook — which my child needs and can't get in a community school.

"The patients in Willowbrook get excellent medical and dental care. They also receive Social Security income from federal and state governments, which our children are denied because they live home and their parents have an income. Also, the state has offered to pay parents to take their children out of Willowbrook. Foster parents are paid to care for a Willowbrook child.

"Our Staten Island Mental Health is in need of \$150,000 to serve our community. That is evaluation and diagnosis of a mentally or physically handicapped child. How can we close Willowbrook when our government ignores a need of an agency for a child to be placed in a special school in our community? We also have an excellent hospital, U.S. Public Health, which takes in some of our handicapped and receives absolutely nothing for them financially.

"I was told at a meeting that I could sign a state form entering my child in Willowbrook (never putting her there) and becoming her foster parent. This way I would receive state aid. No way! If our government ignores this discrimination against our children who live at home, who need just as much help as Willowbrook children, then I will personally make this inhumane policy public.

"The government is helping children in Willowbrook. Then let's lend an ear to all handicapped children, whether it be mentally retarded, physically handicapped, deaf or blind. It is time our children who live at home are given equal rights."

MRS. G. KARA,

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