

# Willowbrook's destiny passes into hands of a tough administrator

By BRUCE ALPERT

U.S. District Court Judge John R. Bartels looked across his Brooklyn courtroom to a long wooden table where James Introne and Thomas A. Coughlin were sitting.

"You must always keep in mind the vision of those hopeless people and the need to do everything possible to help them," said Bartels, looking directly at Introne, the 32-year-old Schenectady native named to replace Coughlin as state mental retardation commissioner. Both were in Bartels' courtroom last week during a hearing about the future of a Manhattan center housing 126 former Staten Island Developmental Center residents.

"Victims" of the mentally retarded came naturally for Coughlin, who last week officially replaced Richard Houghton as head of the state's prison system. Coughlin, a Brooklyn native and former state trooper, is the father of a retarded daughter, Tracy, 19. It was her need for services not available in Watertown, N.Y. in the 1960s, that prompted Coughlin to enter the mental retardation field.

Introne, a former deputy budget director with a master's degree in public administration from Penn State University, promised to follow the judge's advice, although he does not bring the same personal experience to the job.

He is a professional administrator whose specialty is whipping budgets into shape. In contrast to Coughlin, who is known to fly into temper tantrums, Introne is soft spoken and rarely shows much emotion.

State mental retardation officials say he may be just the right man for the job in 1979, just as Coughlin, they say, was the correct choice to run the 27,000-employee department in 1978 and serve as acting director of the Staten Island Developmental Center in 1975.

Coughlin, 42, a resident of Ravena, joined the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities in 1975.

Gov. Carey, who was impressed with the job he did with a private mental retardation program in Jefferson County, called on Coughlin to direct the effort to move residents out of such institutions as Willowbrook and into group homes, where professionals believed they had the best chance of developing to their full potential.

"We really needed somebody to yell and scream and get things going," said a mental retardation official. "Tom was that man. He almost singlehandedly developed our community placement system and had the stamina and emotional wherewithal to fight all of the vested interests."

Today, the program has just about been fully implemented, although placements into group homes and other community residential facilities are still lagging behind court-mandated levels.

"Now, we need someone to implement all of the programs set up by Tom," said longtime Coughlin aide Cora Hoffman. "And Jim is the type of professional administrator that can get the job done."

Introne, in an interview during his first day as mental retardation chief, said that despite community opposition to group homes, he remains confident that the state can meet a court requirement to reduce the population at Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, to 250 by 1981. There are now approximately 2,000 residents at the institution, formerly known as the Willowbrook State School.

"I am generally an optimistic person," said Introne, who even in his blue pin-striped suit still has a boyish appearance. "I believe that when people know the facts, they will generally respond positively to the needs of their fellow human beings."

Introne, who lives in Elsmere with his wife, Valerie, and their two children, said he hopes to develop better relations with the Willowbrook Review Panel.

The panel, which monitors care provided former and current Staten Island Developmental Center residents, often clashed with Coughlin and on several occasions asked that the commissioner be found in contempt of court for allegedly failing to comply with the 1975 Willowbrook Consent Decree.

"There was no doubt that Tom didn't like the panel members and felt they were too rigid in their enforcement of the consent decree," said a mental retardation official. "Jim, on the other hand, knows how to negotiate without

getting all emotional and should develop better relations."

Introne said he would also try to improve state funding for retarded citizens who live at home instead of in state institutions and to develop diagnostic programs for young children suspected of having a retardation problem.

Introne is also expected to take tighter reigns over the agency's \$500-million budget. Critics have complained that not enough of the massive allocation benefits the 15,000 residents in state institutions and too much goes to maintain the agency's massive bureaucracy.

"His background in the budget office is a great tool to bring a department like mental retardation," said a high-ranking aide to Gov. Carey.

Coughlin, who introduced Introne to members of the review panel last week, said he agreed to head the state's 20,000-inmate prison system because of the challenge it provided.

"From the beginning, I said I would not stay in mental retardation for ever," Coughlin said. "I think after a few years, you should move on and give someone else a chance."

Perhaps ironically, Coughlin's first major decision as prison chief will be the selection of a site for a 512-unit prison funded this year by the Legislature.

But Coughlin does not anticipate the type of opposition that often greeted similar decisions on where to locate facilities for the retarded.

"We will probably locate the prison on existing prison grounds in the mid-Hudson area," Coughlin said. "And, in those communities, a prison generally is supported because it means a major boost in the economy."

Coughlin, who like Introne is expected to win easy Senate confirmation for his new post, said that he will always maintain his interest in the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

"Only now," Coughlin said, "I may put back on my parent's hat, since I'm no longer the man in charge."