

EDITORIALS

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Paying for Willowbrook

It's been nearly a decade since Willowbrook and the abuses of the 5,200 mentally retarded inmates there leaped into the headlines. The revelations shocked the city and forced the state to make drastic changes, including a sharp reduction in the number of inmates and the creation of a special panel to oversee the treatment of those who remained.

Since then, the Willowbrook Review Panel has become a national model for supervising the care of the mentally retarded. You'd expect Albany would be proud of that fact. But no, just the opposite.

Last year, the Legislature cut funds for the panel out of the budget entirely. This year, Gov. Carey and the Assembly are supporting a \$350,000 appropriation, but the Senate wants to reduce the sum to zero again.

It's a shabby, cruel form of economy—all the more so since conditions at Willowbrook have gone downhill again. One patient reportedly died in an accident because of lax supervision.

The state made a commitment to underwrite the Willowbrook Review Panel—and properly so. The money can easily be found in a \$16.5 billion budget. And this is no time for winking on a promise to the mentally retarded.