

# Willowbrook case: Seeking greater good

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Last month, lawyers reached an out-of-court settlement they contend will improve New York state's care of some 4,800 mentally retarded patients from Willowbrook.

But in the meantime, critics have questioned whether the settlement, which may be ratified

## Analysis

by a federal judge tomorrow, represents real progress or legal gymnastics and empty promises.

"What we have accomplished is for the greater good. We're trying to avoid a divisive court confrontation which is like a divorce — nobody gains," says Samuel J. Kawola, deputy commissioner of program operations in the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

But Murray B. Schneps, the parent of a 13-year-old retarded girl, has denounced the proposal as "unfortunately and unwittingly

tingly a horrible swipe" at the civil rights of present and former patients at the Staten Island Developmental Center, commonly called Willowbrook.

Which point of view prevails will depend on the outcome of a hearing set to begin in Brooklyn Federal Court tomorrow. Schneps, himself a lawyer, claims he has rallied other parents to his side and threatens to block the proposed settlement.

The terms of the settlement have created a bitter rift between old allies: parents of Willowbrook patients — like Schneps — and the public interest lawyers who have represented them since 1972.

It was lawyers from the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society who sat at the bargaining table with state lawyers to negotiate the settlement, beginning six months ago.

The same lawyers created the Willowbrook Consent Decree in

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