

Willowbrook witness tells what he has seen

By BRUCE ALPERT

A key witness testified yesterday that residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center and other retardation "institutions" live in unsanitary conditions, receive inadequate programs and are poorly clothed.

But the witness, Dr. James Clements, the former head of Georgia's retardation agency conceded that the Willowbrook center and the Nina Eaton Center in Ocean Breeze were considerably cleaner when he toured the facilities Thursday with U.S. District Court Judge John R. Bartels.

Clements said, however, that his testimony of excrement-covered floors and nude patients accurately reflected what he saw at the Island developmental center, the Nina Eaton center and other state and privately run facilities housing members of the "Willowbrook class" during repeated trips. Members of the Willowbrook class are nearly 5,000 residents of the center when civil liberties groups sued the state 10 years ago to press for more humane care of the retarded.

The retardation expert, the head of the Willowbrook Review Panel, a court monitor of state compliance of a 1975 court decree resulting from the 1972 suit, testified for the second straight day in a trial in which the group's are seeking a court-appointed master to run the Willowbrook facility.

During yesterday's hearing,

Bartels, who surprised court observers by interrupting Thursday's court session to tour Willowbrook and the Nina Eaton Center, asked Clements if some of the problems he described were common in developmental centers across the country, including those he once ran in Georgia.

"Unfortunately, the answer is yes," Clements responded.

But Clements said "there is no reason" why state officials allow residents to be dressed in "ripped clothing" that does not fit, give them programs not individually adjusted and force many residents to live in dirty, poorly maintained living units.

The 1975 consent decree man-

dates six hours of programs, but Clements said he saw "inactivity, idleness and boredom" instead.

He said the problems common to all institutions are reason for the court to deny the state permission to establish community-based facilities as large as 50 beds. The decree imposes a 10-bed limit, but the state wants Bartels to allow "more flexibility" in placing Willowbrook class members.

"The point I'm trying to make is that we're adding to the handicaps of the residents by placing

them in these institutions and keeping them in these institutions," Clements testified.

He said the 50-bed facilities he examined, including the Nina Eaton Center, run by the United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State, had the same "institutional" environment as the Staten Island Developmental Center.

"That institutional environment simply does not provide the climate where the retarded can achieve their maximum growth," he said.