

UCP employees to take union vote

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Professional employees at an institution for the mentally retarded in Willowbrook, run by United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State, are scheduled to decide next month in a federally supervised election whether they will unionize.

The election, to be held May 14, was agreed to by United Cerebral Palsy in a stipulation signed this week under the auspices of the National Labor Relations Board.

It is the first official effort to form a union at the Karl D. Warner Center, a 450-bed institution operated by the charitable agency under a state contract, according to Larry Nathan, the attorney for professional employees. Nathan said past efforts, notably the United Federation of Teachers, had floundered before an election could be sought.

The proposed union would be independent, rather than affiliated with any existing labor organization, Nathan, a member of the Manhattan law firm of O'Dwyer, Bernstein, said. A variety of professionals, including speech pathologists, education and recreation therapists and psychologists, are eligible, he said. Nurses have declined to participate, he said.

"The professionals feel they're treated like an extra pair of hands, engaged in too much custodial care" of the retarded patients, Nathan said.

About 135 professional employees of the Warner Center will be eligible to vote "yes" or "no" — indicating whether they want to form a collective bargaining unit

that would negotiate hours, wages and working conditions, Nathan said.

The election, by secret ballot, will be monitored by non-supervisory employees selected by both sides, the union organizers and the management, according to the stipulation.

To form a union, 50 percent plus one person among those eligible must vote in favor. The election was allowed to go forward after 68 employees, considerably more than the required 30 percent of the prospective unit, signed union cards, Nath-

an said.

Glenn Rickles, the attorney who signed the stipulation on behalf of the management of United Cerebral Palsy, did not contest the petition for an election submitted to the Brooklyn regional office of the National Labor Relations Board.

Nathan refused to identify any of the employees who signed the union petition. "We work on the assumption that the critical process in organizing is confidentiality," he said. "Otherwise, the employer would be able to pick out people who are activists."