

# Judge blasts rampant abuses at scandal-plagued Willowbrook...



# 'A CHAMBER OF HORRORS'

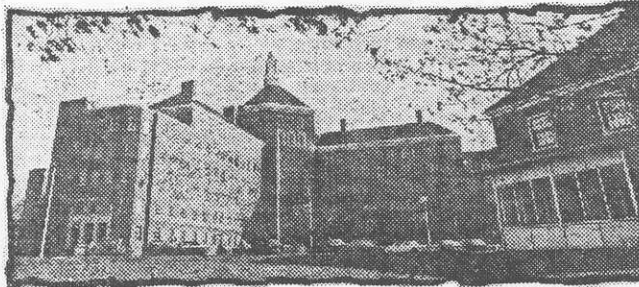
By JERRY CAPECI

A FEDERAL judge yesterday described the scandal-plagued Willowbrook center for the mentally retarded as a chamber of horrors which has gotten worse since conditions were first exposed a decade ago.

Brooklyn Judge John R. Bartels described virtually every area of patient care as inadequate — or worse — at the Staten Island Developmental Center.

In a wide-ranging and scathing opinion, Bartels ordered the state to correct rampant abuses "with all deliberate speed," and said he would appoint a special master . . . as the eyes and ears of the court."

"The fact that a job is difficult does not excuse its nonperformance," wrote



ABC News Photo

Willowbrook center: things have gotten worse.

Bartels.

The judge ruled that the state, which had agreed to correct living conditions and reduce patient population to 250 residents by April 1, 1981, had violated a 1975 order by a federal judge. The population now is 1300.

In April 1975, three years

after the New York Assn. for Retarded Children had sued on behalf of some 5343 residents, the state agreed to "make extensive reforms at Willowbrook with regard to environment, staffing, programming and various types of therapies."

Bartels acknowledged

that "some efforts" were undertaken, but stressed, "Clearly, [the] defendants have not done enough.

"The evidence shows that during the last two years at Willowbrook, sanitation in the remaining buildings, rather than improving, has steadily deteriorated."

The judge found that conditions at other facilities in all the boroughs to which Willowbrook patients were sometimes sent "were not markedly better" and directed state officials to correct conditions in those facilities.

In his decision, Judge Bartels covered the areas of sanitation, maintenance, clothing, programming, special therapies, recreation, nutrition and staffing ratios.

## Dossier of shame

HERE is a summary of the judge's report, which runs to 70 pages and amounts to a dossier of shame:

### SANITATION:

"Sanitation at Willowbrook is totally unsatisfactory and presents a serious health hazard to the resident population. Of particular concern is the filthy condition of the kitchens and bathrooms.

"Both the main kitchen, where the residents' food is prepared, and the satellite kitchens, where

the residents' food is served, are filthy and infested with rodents and cockroaches.

"Cups, bowls, silverware and pots and pans are improperly cleaned and often caked with food from past meals.

"Food is served to residents at inappropriate temperatures that encourage food spoilage and the growth of microorganisms, and food storage areas are dirty and foul-smelling.

"Sanitation of the bathrooms in virtually

every residential building at Willowbrook is grossly inadequate.

"Human feces and urine commonly soil bathroom floors, walls, toilets and shower stalls. Non-operational and unflushed toilets filled with human excrement are frequent occurrences, as are cracked and missing toilet seats, and bathrooms without toilet tissue, towels and soap.

"Mold and mildew, in-

Continued on Page 47

Page 1  
92

Continued from Page 13  
indicative of long-term neglect, grow on many shower surfaces and none of the shower areas is being properly sanitized.

"These types of unsanitary conditions permeate the residents' entire living space. Residents must eat in dining rooms infested with insects and rodents, sit and lie on floors that are dirty, not uncommonly with human excrement, and sleep in bedrooms reeking of urine.

"Their clean clothes and dirty laundry are intermingled, and trash, food and clothing litter the floors.

#### **MAINTENANCE**

"Part of the maintenance problems at Willowbrook, a 50-year-old complex, result from the fact that for years virtually no capital was poured into the physical plant, and until recently, no preventive maintenance measures were taken.

"The most glaring maintenance inadequacies, though, stem from

present, not past, neglect. For instance, throughout the institution, shower fixtures lack vacuum breakers, which are easy to install and necessary to prevent the transmission of contaminated water.

"In almost every building there are numerous examples of torn and broken furniture, ripped and broken screens, missing bathroom tiles, nonworking toilets, and walls with gaping holes.

"According to the state's own auditing teams, Willowbrook's maintenance deficiencies are extensive. Deficiencies [in March, 1981] included lack of privacy in bedroom and bathroom areas, poor lighting, a dearth of decorations, curtains and furniture, and broken water faucets.

"Six months later the deficiencies . . . were even more widespread.

#### **CLOTHING**

"It is overwhelmingly evident that [the] defendants have not fulfilled their agreement

to provide class members with 'clean, adequate and seasonally-appropriate' clothing. Some residents at Willowbrook are partially clothed, others go nude, and many wear clothes that are ill-fitting, badly torn and stained. Shoes are broken and torn, and in winter many of the residents are outfitted in summer attire.

"The insufficient supply of clothing has an adverse affect on residents' programming. A major programming problem at Willowbrook is residents not attending programming because they have nothing to wear."

#### **PROGRAMMING**

"Although the Willowbrook administration has constructed a commendable framework in which to provide programming, serious deficiencies exist in the delivery of programs. Residents rarely receive six hours of appropriate programming. Often they arrive late at the program

area, or do not arrive at all because of lack of transportation or clothing. Even when residents do arrive at their programs, they receive little actual instruction. Residents sit idly, walk about aimlessly, self-stimulate and sleep."

#### **SPECIAL THERAPY**

"Many Willowbrook residents diagnosed as needing recreational, occupational, physical, speech and psychological therapy are not receiving these services."

#### **RECREATION**

"Life in the residential units of Willowbrook . . . is sterile, dreary and one of enforced idleness. Most class members, when not in their program areas, have nothing to do. There is virtually no recreation equipment, toys or games on their units, and very little organized leisure-time activity occurs. In fact, the high incidence of behavior problems among institutionalized class members is, at least partially attribut-

able to the residents' long hours of idleness."

#### **NUTRITION**

"The Willowbrook diet card system, established to insure that residents who require special diets receive them, is not being properly administered. At least one Willowbrook resident choked to death as a result of being served an improper diet.

"The only utensils given to most residents, regardless of their functioning level, are spoons, and often there are not enough of them to go around."

#### **STAFF**

"[The] defendants consistently fail to provide class members with the required levels of supervision. Part of the problem is lack of staff training, lack of staff dedication, and staff negligence. Even when employees are on duty, residents are frequently left unattended or attended by fewer than the mandated number of employees. Even when sufficient staff members are present, they often ignore residents, depriving class members of the 'appreciable and appropriate attention by direct care staff' as required by the consent judgment."

Page 2  
9/2