

Union vote canceled at UCP institution

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Professional employees of an institution for the mentally retarded in Willowbrook, run by United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State, has canceled plans to hold a union election.

The election was canceled because of "feuding" among the 68 employees involved in union organizing, according to their lawyer, Larry Nathan. "I felt the group was not cohesive enough to engage in productive collective bargaining," Nathan said yesterday.

The election, scheduled to be held May 14, would have given 125 professional employees the chance to decide whether to form a union. Nathan said he had withdrawn the petition for the election from the National Labor Relations Board. United Cerebral Palsy never contested the petition.

United Cerebral Palsy, a non-profit agency, spends about \$20 million annually, primarily in state and federal Medicaid funds, to run the institution. Called the Karl D. Warner Center, the facility houses 450 mentally retarded patients.

Glenn Rickles, the lawyer for United Cerebral Palsy, was not in his office and could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Nathan said the Warner Center management had not played a significant role in forcing the cancellation of the election. Despite a "vigorous campaign" against the union effort, he said, United Cerebral Palsy

had not intimidated employees.

Nathan said he called off the election because some of the professionals tried to use it as leverage. About 15 employees met with United Cerebral Palsy officials and tried to extract "promises" in exchange for dropping the union effort, he said.

"They tried to broker the circumstances," he said.

Nathan, an attorney with the firm of O'Dwyer & Bernstein, said he had handled dozens of union elections and this was the first one he had canceled. His chief client is the New York State Federation of Physicians and Dentists.

None of the Warner Center employees currently belong to a union. The election would have applied to psychologists, speech pathologists, recreational and educational therapists and other professionals. Nurses and physicians had not participated in the organizing, Nathan said.