

# Judge closes casebooks on Willowbrook

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It was a living nightmare.

Wretched, unwashed, unattended mentally retarded children and adults, lying in their own filth, warehoused in a hell called Willowbrook.

More than 20 years after the scandal broke, Brooklyn Federal Court Judge John Bartels yesterday signed a permanent injunction ending litigation begun in 1972.

The case, on behalf of more than 5,000 people who once lived in horrendous conditions at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island, was initiated by the New York Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the New York State Association for Retarded Children Inc.

Yesterday's court action replaces the 1975 consent judgment — overseen by Bartels — that governed the care of "Willowbrook class" members for 18 years.

## State obligation

The injunction obligates the state to provide high-quality care and programming, case management and other services for all members of the "Willowbrook class."

Although the consent judgment was limited to the 5,300 Willowbrook residents, Govs. Hugh Carey and Cuomo ordered it applied to the state's entire developmental disabilities service system.

Willowbrook, which became Staten Island Developmental Center, closed Sept. 17, 1987.

Since then, six more of the state's 20 developmental centers have been closed. All are to be closed by the year 2000.

All services will then be provided in the community, Elin M. Howe, commissioner of the state's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said yesterday.

Only 5,900 people still live in institutions, compared with 24,900 in 1972, when the Willowbrook suit was launched, she said, and more than 25,900 people live in the community, compared with 1,900 in 1972.