

To illustrate the point that the Bill has overlooked the VA hospitals is the fact that these hospitals do not fit into the definition in Section 31(a) of "Public Facilities" or Section 33 concerning "Private Facilities". As indicated in Section 31(a), the enumerated Public Facilities definitely exclude VA hospitals and we believe there could be no serious contention that the VA hospitals are "private" facilities under Section 33 which must be licensed by the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Further complicating this matter is the enactment of House Bill 558, approved March 24, 1969, which repealed Sections 19 to 41 of Article 96 $\frac{1}{2}$ (Uniform Veterans Guardianship Act). Section 36 of Article 96 $\frac{1}{2}$ permitted commitment direct to a VA hospital and also permitted the recognition of commitments of mentally ill veterans in other States. This latter provision was especially valuable as it permitted Maryland residents who were committed in other States to be transferred to Perry Point without the traumatic experience of going through a second commitment.

A rather frightening aspect of the proposed Bill as far as VA doctors are concerned is the fact that Section 21 provides severe penalties for persons detaining patients contrary to the provisions of the bill. Another objectionable feature of the proposed Bill is that it provides no legal method for the VA to retain in custody a previously committed veteran dangerous to himself or others who, after July 1, 1969, requests his release.

The matter of this proposed Bill is a problem of great significance to the VA and to the 500,000 veterans residing in Maryland since it would seriously impair our program of treating and rehabilitating our mentally ill veterans. There are in Maryland three veterans hospitals—Perry Point, Fort Howard and Loch Raven which have a total bed capacity of 1804 patients and over 2000 employees. The hospital at Perry Point, Maryland with a 1200 bed capacity and 1181 employees is our hospital primarily concerned with the neuro-psychiatric treatment of mentally ill veterans.

Thank you again, Governor Mandel, for the opportunity of presenting the views of the Veterans Administration concerning Senate Bill No. 285. The VA in opposing the proposed Bill is in no sense taking an obstructionist attitude. For years we have been in the forefront of progressive legislation concerning the mentally ill and would welcome the opportunity to participate in any future endeavors. We regret that we were never consulted or contacted in regard to this legislation and have had to make our appeal to you at this late date.

We urge you to veto Senate Bill No. 285 and provide an opportunity for the Veterans Administration to work with the proponents of this legislation so that a bill may be drafted which will permit the VA hospitals in Maryland to continue to hospitalize and treat our mentally ill veterans.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ RUFUS H. WILSON,

Manager.