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State gov't acts ^{SUN} to keep patients ^{JULY 8/70} ^{P: 74}

14,000 of 24,000 patients - involuntary

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A U.S. district court has ruled that some 14,000 Pennsylvania mental patients can go free Sept. 15 but efforts are under way to make certain most of them won't.

The court ruled in Scranton, Pa. April 22 that these 14,000 patients were denied due process when they were placed in one of the state's 18 mental hospitals without a court order and against their own will. Previously a family could have a patient committed with the concurrence of two doctors.

Not affected by the court order are about 10,000 voluntary patients and those committed by a civil court.

"Wherever possible the 14,000 patients are to be converted to voluntary patients," said Dr. Philip Laucks, acting dep-

uty secretary for mental health and mental retardation in the department of welfare.

"If a patient needs further care and is not willing to remain in the hospital, it will become necessary for the family or the institution to seek civil court commitment by Sept. 15," he said.

A civil court commitment also involves examination by two doctors, but here their opinion isn't necessarily automatic. The prospective patient also has the right to cross examination which was denied him under the old rules.

Dr. Laucks said letters are being sent to families of the 14,000 notifying them of the court decision.

Ordinarily, once a patient was committed under the old method, his stay was left to the discretion of the staff at the institution.