



September 4, 2014

## **The Impact of Constitutional Amendment #1**

On November 4<sup>th</sup> Louisiana voters will decide on a constitutional amendment that, if passed, will have a negative impact on many people with developmental disabilities, seniors, and other vulnerable populations.

Research has shown that people with developmental disabilities who live in their own homes or with their families are happier, healthier, more independent, and more included in their communities than people with developmental disabilities who live in institutional or other congregate settings. They have more opportunities to develop relationships with people without disabilities, work in meaningful jobs, perform volunteer work, and be contributing members of society.

People with developmental disabilities often need support services to enable them to live at home, such as assistance with eating, dressing, transferring in and out of a wheelchair, and managing their finances. Families often need a break from their caregiving responsibilities to attend to personal and household responsibilities. Many people/families receive support services from a program called the home and community-based waiver that enable them to remain in their homes and communities. The average cost of these services is less than the average cost of an institutional setting. Unfortunately, over 13,000 people with developmental disabilities in Louisiana are on a waiting list for home and community-based waiver services. In addition, approximately 36,000 senior citizens, and adults who acquired a disability later in life, are also waiting for home and community-based services.

Each year the Louisiana Legislature meets and must approve the state budget. When budget cuts are necessary, the legislature is limited in which areas they can make cuts because most of the state budget is protected or “dedicated,” meaning the funds can’t be spent on anything else. The portion of the budget that CAN be cut includes health care and higher education so these areas take a disproportionate share of the cuts. The health care budget includes services for people with developmental disabilities, seniors, and other vulnerable populations, such as those needing hospice or mental health services.

In November, voters will consider proposed Constitutional Amendment #1 which, if passed, would provide constitutional rate protection for nursing homes and institutions for people with developmental disabilities. In other words, funding for these institutions would move to the “protected” part of the budget, making it very difficult to cut. The small piece of the “budget pie” that is currently “unprotected” and available for cuts will shrink if this constitutional amendment passes, leaving home and community-based and other critical services, and higher education, more vulnerable to cuts.

The overwhelming majority of people with disabilities want to live at home or with their families. Many people are concerned that if Constitutional Amendment #1 passes, it will negatively impact those who need support to remain in their own homes.

