**Op-Ed**

**State Leaders Must Act to Ensure Equal Opportunities for People with Developmental Disabilities**

*by* ***(Name of local contact)***

As Florida looks for ways to balance the state budget while meeting the basic needs of its citizens, we must make choices that protect the quality of life for our most vulnerable populations, including those with developmental disabilities.

When given access to adequate services and support, Floridians with developmental disabilities can – and do – become self-sufficient citizens that are willing and able to attend school, work and play in the community, pay taxes and vote.

Undoubtedly, there are tough budget decisions ahead. However, the best decisions will be those that encourage sustainability and lead to future cost savings for all citizens. The (**Name of local group)** believes that supporting the continuum of life for persons with disabilities, including those on the waiting list for services, is an integral part of this solution.

These issues will take center stage on (**local date)** which is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day in (**city or county**). Advocates around the area have been raising their voices to show their support for the funding of services and programs that ensure an acceptable quality of life for our underserved citizens. It is vitally important that our lawmakers hear their voices and understand the need to provide funding for fundamental services for people with developmental disabilities.

Some of those choices are more difficult than others. Some may determine whether our most vulnerable citizens receive essential services needed to sustain the quality of their lives and determine whether they can continue to live independently as contributing members of our society, rather than be isolated or discarded.

It’s vitally important that all our citizens join in urging our legislators to be bold, courageous and do the right thing by finding the funds to provide essential services to people with developmental disabilities and their families. We support budget recommendations that provide additional funding for people on the Agency for Persons with Disabilities waiver waiting list. This recommendation allows individuals with the most critical needs, some of whom have been waiting for years, to begin receiving critically needed services.

Here are the most critical needs in (name **of city or county**): (**List critical needs in your area**)

One voice can be heard when combined with many others. One face commands attention when joined by many others. And one bold and creative effort by those we’ve elected to represent us can give strength to those among us who are most in need and most vulnerable.

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**(Include a brief bio and contact information for the author of the Op-Ed)**