Amendment 3 could hurt crucial local services

Your Turn

Nelle S. Miller

Guest columnist

Florida voters will soon make an important decision about the future of property taxes in our state.

Amendment 3, which will appear on the Nov. 3 general election ballot, would increase Florida's homestead exemption from $50,000 to $150,000 in 2027 and to $250,000 in 2028.

For homeowners who qualify, that means a larger portion of their home's assessed value would be exempt from certain property taxes.

On the surface, that sounds like welcome relief at a time when families are paying more for food, gas, housing and other necessities.

But there's another side of this proposal that deserves careful consideration: What happens to the local services and resources our communities rely on when billions of dollars in tax revenue disappear?

According to the Florida Policy Institute, Amendment 3 could reduce state and local revenue by roughly $12 billion on a recurring basis.

That loss would leave local governments facing difficult choices: reduce public services, find other sources of revenue, or increase fees and other costs to taxpayers.

Those decisions matter to all of us, but especially to people who already have few resources to fall back on.

At All Faiths Food Bank, we see every day how difficult it is for many local families to make ends meet.

When the cost of living rises, there's often nothing left in the household budget to cut.

Many of the neighbors who come to us for food are renters who would not directly benefit from an increased homestead exemption.

They will, however, feel the effects of reduced or more costly community services – from libraries and parks to road maintenance, emergency preparedness, public health and other resources that help neighborhoods to function and families thrive.

In Sarasota County alone, the Florida Policy Institute estimates Amendment 3 could reduce the county's budget by more than $210 million on a recurring basis. In DeSoto County, the estimated impact is $8.9million.

Those are significant numbers.

Behind them are real decisions about what services communities can continue to provide, what they may have to reduce, and where the costs of those reductions may ultimately fall.

As a nonprofit focused on hunger relief, All Faiths Food Bank does not endorse candidates or engage in partisan politics. But it is important for us to speak up when public policy will affect the people and communities that rely on us for support.

Nonprofits are often asked to fill the gaps when public resources fall short.

We're proud to do that work, but charitable organizations cannot replace the scale, stability or responsibility of public investment.

At a time when nonprofits across Florida are already facing growing demand for services and increased pressure on philanthropic dollars, we should be thoughtful about creating additional needs that our charitable sector may not be able to meet.

This is not an argument against helping Florida homeowners keep more of their hard-earned money.

Tax relief can provide meaningful assistance to families.

But we also need to consider the full picture – including who benefits directly, who may not and what happens when local governments have fewer resources to provide the services on which communities depend.

Whatever your perspective on Amendment 3, I encourage you to learn more before casting your ballot.

The numbers are significant, and so are the potential consequences for the communities we all call home.

Our neighbors deserve policies that recognize both the challenges families face today and the resources communities need to remain strong tomorrow.

Nelle S. Miller is the president and CEO of All Faiths Food Bank, which serves Sarasota and DeSoto counties.