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MASSCAP and Community Teamwork Launch Annual Statewide Volunteer Free Tax Preparation Program for Low Income Families

· Earned Income Tax Awareness Day ·

Lowell, Mass. (January 26, 2024) – Today the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) along with [Community Teamwork Inc.\(CTI\)](#) were joined by Senator Edward Markey and Senator Elizabeth Warren via video and in person by Senator Pavel Payano (First Essex), Representative Rodney Elliott (16th Middlesex), Representative Vanna Howard (17th Middlesex), Paul Ratha Yem, Vice Mayor, City of Lowell, as well as Ronald Deaett, Territory Manager, IRS Stakeholder Partnerships Education & Communication, Tana Qoqi, Local Taxpayer Advocate, Jessica Keegan, Baby Steps Program Manager, Office of Economic Empowerment (MA), Mireille Eastman, Taxpayer Advocate, Department of Revenue (MA) and representatives from MassBudget and Childrens Healthwatch among others in kicking off this year’s tax season by launching the annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) as well as recognizing the importance of accessing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

VITA is administered by Community Action Agencies (CAAs) annually and helps thousands of wage earners access millions of dollars in tax refunds, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). In Massachusetts, CAAs help more than 15,000 low-income taxpayers benefit from more than \$26 million in tax refunds.

“We are grateful to our legislators and the governor for joining with us to help income workers bridge the passage of an increased state EIC, as well as the new child of family tax credits. Especially in the current challenging times, helping low-income workers access these tax credits - powerful antipoverty tools — is so critical. The cost of living has increased, and so many are counting on the resources VITA sites can help them access through free tax preparation,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP Executive Director. He continued, “Our goal for today, as we are joined by friends and allies from across the state, is to raise awareness about the availability of free tax preparation including access to tax credits and financial empowerment services.”

There are approximately 80 VITA sites operating across the state, run by Community Action Agencies and other community-based organizations and colleges. Together they serve more than 30,000 low-income taxpayers, helping them to access over \$60 million in tax refunds. VITA sites are supported by state resources in the state budget, by resources from the IRS and by private donations.

“We are also grateful to the state legislature and the governor for investing in VITA sites over the past three years. We are also grateful for the funding provided and for the partnership and technical support we receive from the IRS and DOR,” said Ancel Tejada, Program Manager, Financial Empowerment, MASSCAP.

The 2024 MASSCAP VITA program kicked off in Lowell at Community Teamwork Inc. The MASSCAP VITA program supports 21 Community Action Agencies’ VITA sites. At these VITA sites, volunteers not only provide

free tax prep and access to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other tax credits to low-income taxpayers allowing them to pay bills, cover essential needs such as rent, save, and plan for the future, but also link them to other critical services strengthening families and the local economy. This year, VITA sites will help more and more taxpayers and ensure that taxpayers access the new MA Child and Family Tax Credit and increased EITC as well as other expanded tax credits.

The volunteers are the heart and soul of the VITA program. They are IRS Certified experts who volunteer their time to help to ensure timely, accurate returns as well as full access to tax credits and savings programs.

“We are thrilled to host the statewide VITA Kick-Off today at Community Teamwork and to recognize the importance of VITA along with the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit programs which help keep our families out of poverty and improve the well-being of families and children in Massachusetts,” said Karen Frederick, CEO, Community Teamwork.

“Inflation has hit us all, but those who live below the poverty level are affected the utmost. Thanks to the services of MASSCAP and CTI, populations in our communities can be assured to benefit from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that was part of the comprehensive tax relief package, that I was proud to vote for specifically to help low-income families,” Representative Rodney Elliott told us.

The Earned Income Tax Credit has been called one of the most successful antipoverty programs. It bridges the wage gap – since the late 1970’s wages have not kept up with productivity and many working people have trouble meeting their basic needs. The EITC, along with other tax credits, has been shown to improve infant health outcomes, employment rates of single mothers, child educational achievement, and future earnings. The increase in the MA EITC from 30 to 40% will have a big impact for so many. January 26 is also National Earned Income Tax Awareness Day.

“It’s important our working families know about the Earned Income Tax Credit and Tax Child credits because they help families with basic needs and who face food insecurity to have food on the table to feed their family, support early education, help families avoid poverty, for our working families across Massachusetts. EITC has a proven record of improving infant health incomes, child educational achievement, employment stability for women, and many other positive outcomes. Thank you, MASSCAP and CTI, for hosting this annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) as well as recognizing the importance of accessing these earned tax credits, and the boost it provides to our economy,” said Representative Vanna Howard.

“As we celebrate and are very appreciative of the additional tax benefits available to families in Massachusetts, without access to programs like VITA fewer families will access the resources they need and to which they are entitled. We know that additional financial resources, like tax credits, have a direct impact on family health and well-being. VITA is key to receipt of those in full.” Dr. Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Executive Director, Children’s HealthWatch.

Senator Edward Markey shared with us, “Massachusetts is also now home to the nation’s most generous child and family tax credit. Here in Congress, we are working hard to follow your lead and re-expand the federal EITC and Child Tax Credit. Expiration of these tax credits expansions resulted in a record rise in child poverty. That is unacceptable.” He continued reminding us that “A tax credit without equitable and just access helps no one, and that is why Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites across the state are so important.”

In addition to VITA, the 23 Community Action Agencies across Massachusetts offer a wide range of services including Early Education and Care including Head Start, Fuel Assistance, housing and energy programs and financial education. This integrated approach is very powerful and is a fundamental part of how CAAs help people stabilize their lives and move onto economic mobility.

For more information on VITA, please visit www.masscap.org/freetaxprep.

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