



Contact:

Joe Diamond,
Executive Director, MASSCAP
617 645 2949 or joediamond@masscap.org

Suzanne Morse
Ph: (617) 646-1020
smorse@oneilandassoc.com

Community Action Agencies and MASSCAP Kick Off Tax Season with 2018 Launch of Volunteer Tax Assistance Program that Aids Low Income Families

Lawrence, Mass. (January 26, 2018) – The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) and the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council today joined State Senator Barbara L'Italien (D – Andover), State Senator Kathleen O'Connor Ives (D – Newburyport), State Representative Linda Dean Campbell (D – Methuen), State Representative Diana DiZoglio (D – Methuen), State Representative Juana Matias (D – Lawrence), and State Representative Frank Moran (D – Lawrence) in kicking off this year's tax season by launching the annual volunteer tax assistance program (VITA).

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 have helped more than 17,000 low income tax payers benefit from more than \$32 million in tax refunds.

“The EITC has been called one of the nation's greatest success stories in helping to ease the burden of poverty,” said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP's Executive Director. “The VITA program is an essential part of that success, since it is the program that helps connect low income working families to those who can help them navigate the process.”

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 tax payers, helping them to access over \$60 million in tax refunds. In 2017, legislation was filed by State Senator James Welch (D – West Springfield) and State Representative DiZoglio that would support voluntary income tax assistance sites and expand access to the Earned Income Tax Credit. Representative Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge) and Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton) are sponsors of legislation to increase the state EITC to 50 percent of the federal; currently the state EITC, which was increased in 2016, is 23 percent of the federal tax credit.

The 2018 MASSCAP VITA program kick off was held in Lawrence at Greater Lawrence Community Action Council's VITA site. The MASSCAP VITA program supports 20 Community Action Agencies' VITA sites. It is underwritten in part by a core three-year grant from the US Internal Revenue Service which represents 10 to 20 percent of the resources needed to support VITA sites. Community Action Agencies also work with local private and public funders to support their free tax preparation work.

“There are many families and individuals in Lawrence who are living in poverty and are working hard every day to provide for themselves and their families. The VITA program is one important way for them to address the

challenges associated with poverty, and we're happy to offer it to these clients," said Evelyn Friedman, Executive Director of Greater Lawrence Community Action Council (GLCAC).

The Earned Income Tax Credit has been called one of the most successful antipoverty programs as it helps people not only address financial needs and to save, but also those who go to a free tax site are connected to scores of other services like financial education, Head Start, and fuel assistance. As a program, 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. It supports the proposition that in the United States, people who work 40 hours a week should not have to struggle to get by.

A further benefit of the VITA program is that those who qualify save over \$4.5 million by not going to fee-for-service tax preparation sites. Volunteer tax preparers, many who already have professional tax and finance experience or are finance students from local colleges, are trained and certified by the IRS.

"Community Action Agencies throughout the Commonwealth and beyond have developed innovative services to help meet our clients' needs," said Clare Higgins, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, Community Action of Franklin, Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions. "The volunteer tax assistance program is just one way that we help individuals overcome the structural barriers that exist to move people out of poverty."

The 23 Community Action Agencies across Massachusetts offer a wide range of services including Head Start, Fuel Assistance, 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.

//End

About MASSCAP

The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) is a statewide association of the 23 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) operating in Massachusetts. Through the combined skills and vision of its members, MASSCAP works to enhance the ability of each agency to better serve its clients. We work with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other state agencies to open doors to self-sufficiency for low-income Massachusetts residents.

About Community Action Agencies (CAAs)

Community Action Agencies work to help our most vulnerable populations, especially the poor. Rooted in the communities we serve, we ensure that the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable are met. Our agencies provide basic social safety net services, including administration of services that help mothers and children afford nutritious food, assistance that prevents seniors from going cold in the winter, and centers that provide quality early child care to families. Last year, FY2016, CAAs helped more than 600,000 people in need.

We are also at the forefront of providing vulnerable populations with innovative services that help move individuals and families to economic independence. By employing thousands throughout the state, and by administering services whose funds create an important multiplier effect throughout communities, Community Action Agencies are important economic engines, especially in the Gateway cities of Massachusetts.