



Contact:

Joe Diamond,
Executive Director, MASSCAP
617.357.6086 or joediamond@masscap.org

Lisa Clay
Director of Communications/Member Services, MASSCAP
617.357.6086 or lisaclay@masscap.org

MASSCAP and Community Action Agencies Launch Annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program that Aids Low Income Families

Earned Income Tax Awareness Day

Fitchburg, Mass. (January 25, 2019) – The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) and the Montachusett Opportunity Council (MOC) today were joined by Senator Dean Tran (Worcester and Middlesex), Representative Stephan Hay (3rd Worcester), Representative Natalie Higgins (4th Worcester, Fitchburg Mayor Stephen Dinatale, Everett Handford, State Outreach Director & Regional Director, U.S. Senator Warren and Department of Revenue Commissioner Christopher C. Harding among others in kicking off this year’s tax season by launching the annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) and 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 have helped more than 17,000 low income tax payers benefit from more than \$32 million in tax refunds.

“The VITA program is an essential program that helps connect low income working families to those who can help them navigate the tax process,” said MASSCAP’s Executive Director Joe Diamond. “VITA sites not only offer free tax prep by IRS Certified volunteers who help them access the EITC and other tax credits, but also access to savings programs and other critical services. The volunteers are the heart and soul of this work and we thank them for their service.”

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. Last week, legislation was filed by State Representative Linda Campbell (15th Essex), State Senator James Welch (Hampden), Senator Diana DiZoglio (First Essex) and State Representative Marjorie Decker (25th Middlesex) that would support voluntary income tax assistance sites and expand access to the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The 2019 MASSCAP VITA program kick off was held this morning in Fitchburg at Montachusett Opportunity 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. It is also supported in part by the Department of Housing

and Community Development (DHCD). Community Action Agencies also work with local private and public funders to support their free tax preparation work.

“We are pleased to host the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) Statewide Kickoff and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Awareness Day in Fitchburg,” stated Representative Stephan Hay. “In its thirteenth year, MOC’s VITA program has provided access to free tax preparation to thousands of families and account for millions of dollars in refunds returned to our community’s residents. We applaud MOC and MASSCAP for their efforts to bring attention to this important community resource.”

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.

"The impact of the VITA program ripples throughout our community," stated Kevin Reed, executive director of Montachusett Opportunity Council. "The money VITA clients are able to save by not going to fee-based tax chains and the tax credit they are able to benefit from not only improve their quality of life, but allow them to contribute to the local economy, which brings greater economic stability to our entire community."

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.

“Community Action Agencies throughout the Commonwealth and beyond have developed innovative services to help meet our clients’ needs,” said Birgitta Damon, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, Lynn Economic Opportunity (LEO). “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.”

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

//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, FY2017, CAAs helped approximately 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.