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## Community Action Agencies Partner with Code for America to Offer Virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program *MASSCAP and Boston Tax Coalition Launch Pilot*

**Boston, MA (June 16, 2020)** – Preparing and filing tax returns bring everyone stress annually, especially those living with low incomes, and especially during a time of crisis when it is harder to access services. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites offer free tax preparation by IRS-certified volunteers, access to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as well as other tax credits, and financial education. VITA sites are located at Community Action Agencies and other community organizations, and therefore, easily link taxpayers to other critical services. This year, during this time of COVID-19, VITA sites have needed to find safe ways to continue to serve taxpayers. It is even more critical to ensure that everyone files taxes in order to access stimulus money and much needed tax credits/refunds.

Together with the Boston Tax Coalition, we have partnered with [Code for America](#), an organization dedicated to making the government work for the people, by the people in the digital age, to pilot a program to offer a safe and secure virtual VITA program. The program involves online intake including secure upload of needed documents through their GetYourRefund application, phone interview with taxpayer, free tax preparation by the VITA site volunteer, phone quality review with taxpayer, electronic signature through the secure [DocuSign](#), and electronic submission.

“We are thrilled to be partnering with Code for America, said Joe Diamond, MASSCAP Executive Director. The virtual system they have developed will allow taxpayers to do everything from the safety of their own home for free. With the extension of the federal and state tax deadlines to July 15, we are looking forward to serving MA low-income taxpayers in this safe and easy way while still providing all the benefits that VITA sites and their volunteers provide.”

There are 80 VITA sites operating across the Commonwealth serving more than 30,000 taxpayers who access more than \$60 million in tax credits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit. More than half of those taxpayers are served by Community Action VITA sites.

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. According to

Code for America, one in five eligible households are not claiming the EITC. In this time of crisis, we know that even more people are having trouble meeting their basic needs and are uncertain about their future. It is even more critical that we help as many people as possible file their taxes and access the EITC.

“Community Action Agencies throughout the Commonwealth respond to the current needs of their clients and communities with innovative services,” said Birgitta Damon, MASSCAP President and Executive Director, LEO Inc. “This Virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program will help allow individuals to complete their tax returns and access their refunds while staying safe.”

The Massachusetts Association of Community Action’s 23 private, non-profit human service and advocacy organizations are open and continue to work to administer key anti-poverty programs in every city and town in the Commonwealth. These organizations serve approximately 600,000 low-income people annually, more than half of them with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level.

For more than 55 years, Community Action Agencies have been on the front lines of addressing poverty -- administering federal programs, federal community services and community development grants, and state funds. CAAs are economic engines in cities and towns across Massachusetts, providing communities with an annual infusion of over \$500 million in total resources. CAAs generate at least twice that amount helping clients achieve economic stability and mobility.

For more information about VITA and to find your Community Action VITA site, please visit <https://www.masscap.org/freetaxprep>.

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