



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 Berkshire Community Action Council Launch Annual Statewide Volunteer Free Tax Preparation Program that Aids Low Income Families · *Earned Income Tax Awareness Day* ·

Stockbridge, Mass. (January 28, 2022) – Today the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) along with Berkshire Community Action Council were joined by Congressman Richard Neal, Senator Adam Hinds, and Representative John Barrett III 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 18,000 low-income taxpayers benefit from more than \$33 million in tax refunds.

“Especially in these continued challenging times, helping low-income workers access the EITC – one of our most powerful tools to address poverty – is so critical. So many have lost income and are counting on the resources VITA sites can help them with through free tax preparation. Our goal for today, as we are joined by friends and allies from across the state, is to raise awareness about the ready availability of free tax preparation at VITA sites performed by IRS-certified volunteers,” pointed out Joe Diamond, MASSCAP Executive Director.

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 state resources in the state budget, by resources from the IRS and by private donations.

“We are grateful to the state legislature and the governor for investing in VITA sites over the past two years. We are also grateful for the funding provided and for the partnership and technical support we receive from the IRS,” said Diamond.

The 2022 MASSCAP VITA program kicked off in Stockbridge at the Norman Rockwell Museum including both in person and virtual participants. 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, including Non-Filers and Lapsed Filers qualifying for the EITC and CTC, access these vital resources that can make all the difference, especially now as we emerge from the pandemic and the people served at VITA sites look forward to a hopeful future.

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.

“BCAC is delighted to host the VITA kickoff, Deborah Leonczyk, Executive Director, BCAC, said. “Along with the help of our community partners, Habitat for Humanity, The Berkshire United Way and Williams College, the VITA program helps nearly 1300 families with free income tax preparation here in the Berkshires. It is important to note that VITA is the vehicle families use to access the EITC which is widely touted as one of the best anti-poverty programs in the country. Locally, we help low-income working families to access more than a half million dollars in additional income through the EITC.”

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. January 28 is also national Earned Income Tax Awareness Day.

Congressman Richard Neal, Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means, who is a leading champion on the Earned Income Tax Credit and its power to bridge the wage gap and fight poverty, told us “As we get closer to tax season, it is important that individuals know of the many resources that are available to help with filing and answering questions that may arise. The Berkshire Community Action Council’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program is one that folks should be aware of. VITA offers free federal and state tax preparation by trained volunteers to low-income families in Berkshire County. We’ve worked hard on the Ways and Means Committee to ensure that provisions aimed at helping workers and families get a tax break - like the Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit and others - are protected. The VITA program will ensure that filers receive all the benefits available to them and don’t leave any on the table.”

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 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.

//End