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MASSCAP and South Shore Community Action Council Launch Annual Statewide Volunteer Free Tax Preparation Program for Low Income Families · *Earned Income Tax Awareness Day* ·

Plymouth, Mass. (January 27, 2023) – Today the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) along with South Shore Community Action Council (SSCAC) were joined by Representative Kathleen LaNatra (12th Plymouth), Senators Elizabeth Warren (via video message), U.S. Representative Bill Keating (via video message), Allison Bovell-Ammon, Director of Policy & Communications, Children’s HealthWatch, Boston Medical Center, Daphna Gluck, Director of Program Evaluation, Office of the Treasurer and Receiver General, Office of Economic Empowerment (MA), and Claudia Catalano Family and Community Health Policy and Systems Director, Division of Pregnancy, Infancy and Early Childhood, Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition, MA Department of Public Health 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 typically help more than 18,000 low-income taxpayers benefit from more than \$33 million in tax refunds.

“Especially in the current challenging times, helping low-income workers access the EITC – one of our most powerful tools to address poverty – is so critical. Cost of living has increased, and so many are counting on the resources VITA sites can help them with 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 availability of free tax preparation including access to tax credits and financial empowerment services,” 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 three years. We are also grateful for the funding provided and for the partnership and technical support we receive from the IRS,” said Diamond.

The 2023 MASSCAP VITA program kicked off in Plymouth at the South Shore Community Action Council main location and home of their VITA program. The MASSCAP VITA program supports 20 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 are emerging from the pandemic and are experiencing very high cost of living.

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 privileged to have the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the impact of the VITA program here at SSCAC and in Massachusetts" said Lisa Spencer, Chief Executive Officer, SSCAC.

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 27 is also National Earned Income Tax Awareness Day.

"Research overwhelmingly shows the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) improve health and well-being for children and families," says Allison Bovell-Ammon, Director of Policy and Communications for Children's HealthWatch. "The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance network is critical for increasing access to EITC and CTC and ensuring these evidence-based credits benefit families with low incomes."

Senator Elizabeth Warren thanked the VITA sites for their work and emphasized the importance of the EITC and CTC as "powerful tools to help keep families out of poverty and keep kids from going hungry." She continued, "With inflation this year at record highs, and as we are all still recovering from the impact of the pandemic, these credits have been critical for people who needed to buy diapers or people who needed to pay maintenance to make sure their cars were safe to drive and much, much more."

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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