

Free Tax Prep Sites for Low-Income Residents

City and state officials announced Jan. 29 the opening of free community tax service sites for Baltimore's low-income working families.

Now in its eighth year, the Baltimore CASH—Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope—Campaign is operating 18 free community tax preparation sites throughout the city and two locations in Baltimore County. The sites provide help for working families to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and provide an alternative to high-cost refund anticipation loans.

Spanish-speakers have two sites they can visit this year. Most sites are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Baltimore CASH campaign is a coalition of nonprofits, government and business groups that works to promote financial stability for low-income working families in Baltimore. The campaign focuses on helping working families maximize their resources by: conducting marketing and outreach

around the EITC; providing free tax preparation services; and connecting clients to wealth creation resources.

The campaign urges anyone who made less than \$42,000 in 2008 to call the United Way's First Call for Help at 410-685-0525 or go on-line at www.baltimore-cashcampaign.org to see if they qualify to receive more than \$6,000 in EITC, a kind of tax refund.

Last year, the Baltimore CASH campaign provided 13,200 low-income taxpayers with free tax preparation assistance, enabling them to claim over \$15 million in EITC refunds.

Throughout the past eight years, over 37,000 people have received free tax preparation services, bringing more than \$54 million back to low-income residents in Baltimore City and County.

Officials who joined in making the announcement about the free tax service included Congressmen Elijah Cumming and John Sarbanes, Comptroller Peter Franchot and Baltimore CASH Campaign's Robin McKinney.

Along with providing free tax preparation services, the congressmen, comptroller, mayor's office and the Baltimore CASH Campaign hope to put a dent in the estimated \$29 million of EITC benefits that go unclaimed by eligible city residents each year.

-AFRO Staff

