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Consumer Affairs urges New Yorkers to watch their mail for H&R Block rebates

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) is urging New York City taxpayers to watch their mail closely. As part of the DCA's \$4.2 million settlement with H&R Block, the company has completed mailing \$35 rebate coupons to 61,700 City residents who used the company's Refund Anticipation Loan Services and filed for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in tax years 2000 and 2001. 17,500 of those customers will receive an additional rebate coupon next year.

"It is important for the New Yorkers who used these services to watch their mail closely, follow the instructions carefully, and not lose or forget to mail in the appropriate coupons," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra.

The coupons are redeemable as follows:

- **Consumers who will be using H & R Block for tax services during this year's tax season must mail the rebate coupon for this year's services by April 15, 2003.**
- **Consumers who will not be using H & R Block's services during this tax season must hold on to their coupons and mail them in between April 16, 2003 and June 15, 2003 for a cash rebate.**
- **Consumers using either option must mail the rebate coupon to H & R Block in the self-addressed, pre-stamped envelopes the company will provide.**

In December 2002 DCA announced the agency's record settlement in its lawsuit against H&R Block for allegedly engaging in misleading and deceptive trade practices. In addition to paying approximately \$2.7 million in consumer restitution, H&R Block has agreed to pay over a two-year period approximately \$725,000 in fines and costs, \$345,000 to support the City's EITC campaign, and \$475,000 for the production and distribution of EITC educational materials. In addition, H&R Block has agreed to a three-year injunction and oversight by an independent monitor.

In an effort to increase the number of qualifying New Yorkers who file for the EITC, DCA has coordinated a broad coalition of government agencies, corporations, and community organizations. The EITC returns federal and state government dollars to filers either through tax credits or as cash refunds to working families. There are approximately 230,000 New York City residents who qualify for the federal and state EITC but do not file. This tax season, volunteer tax assistance centers will be available throughout the City to assist qualifying filers with tax preparation. For more information, contact the DCA hotline at (212) 487-4444 or online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.