

Monday, March 6, 2006

RECORD NUMBER OF NEW YORKERS CALLING 311 TO CLAIM THE EITC

Former President Bill Clinton Records EITC Phone Message to Reach Union Members

Early numbers of New Yorkers responding to the Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition indicate that a record number of filers will file at Coalition partner sites. Launched by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg on January 19, the 100-member Coalition includes The William J. Clinton Foundation. Former President Bill Clinton recorded a 30-second phone message telling New Yorkers to contact the Foundation website or call 311 for more information about the EITC and free tax sites.

The phone blast designed to reach EITC-qualifying members of six City labor unions - including 1199SEIU, UNITE HERE! (including the NY Hotel-Motel Trades Council), AFSCME District Council 1707, SEIU 74, Teamsters Local 237, and AFSCME DC37 - also is being distributed by the New York Central Labor Council and several nonprofit partners.

During the first four weeks of the 2006 New York City Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Campaign, nearly 5,000 New Yorkers have called 311 to find out about the EITC and where they can have their taxes filed for free. In January alone, calling volume about the EITC to 311 was more than double the same time last year. The free tax sites report a higher volume of filers with more than 20,000 filers in the first month of the tax season.

"More New Yorkers are calling 311 to find out about the EITC, and in the first month Coalition partners are reporting marked increases in the volume of people showing up at free tax centers - that's exciting," said Jonathan Mintz, Acting Commissioner of the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs. "We're especially grateful to President Clinton for lending his voice to New York City's effort."

The EITC is a federal, state and city tax credit that could return as much as \$6,000 to qualifying working families who earn less than \$35,000 a year, or if married and filing jointly, less than \$37,000 a year, just by filing their taxes. Individuals ages 25-64 who earn less than \$12,000 may also be eligible. Those who are eligible can also file retroactively for up to three years, sometimes doubling or tripling their refund. Last year, New Yorkers received more than \$2 billion in EITC credits but approximately 200,000 more who were eligible missed out. In 2004, the average New York City combined refund was \$2,355.

To help taxpayers claim the money they deserve, the DCA launched an expanded campaign that includes locations citywide where individuals can have their taxes prepared for free, as well as discount vouchers for services of H&R Block and Jackson Hewitt for participating unions before April 18th. H&R Block has also extended discount services to EITC-eligible City residents residing in 19 target neighborhoods. Millions of materials are being distributed citywide in eleven languages: **Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, Haitian-Creole, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu**. New Yorkers are urged to call 311 (or 212-NEW-YORK) 24 hours a day with access to 170 languages, or go online to www.nyc.gov/eitc to find EITC qualifications and the nearest free tax preparation location and operating hours.