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***Consumers Energy Grant Supports Free
Income Tax Preparation for Michigan Taxpayers***
More Than \$2 billion in tax credits and heating assistance due Michigan Workers

LANSING – Thousands of Michigan workers could be eligible for state and federal tax credits and not know it. A \$150,000 grant from Consumers Energy to the Michigan Economic Impact Coalition is helping to change that through the promotion of free income tax preparation and filing services offered across the state by thousands of IRS trained and certified volunteer preparers.

“Thousands of Michigan taxpayers may overlook valuable tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit or Michigan’s Home Heating Credit. As a result, millions of dollars in tax relief could be left in Lansing or Washington, DC instead coming back to Michigan communities,” said Ross Yednock, Program Director of the Michigan Economic Impact Coalition (MEIC) at the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan. **“Thanks to Consumers Energy, we are getting the word out about these credits and the quality services available to help Michigan taxpayers keep more of what they earn by preparing and filing both state and federal tax returns for free.”**

Through the website www.MichiganFreeTaxHelp.org, the MEIC provides information and tips for Michigan taxpayers to save money when preparing and filing their taxes. Anyone who earned \$54,000 or less from wages, self-employment or farming in 2015 should check to see if they qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). If eligible, they could receive up to \$6,645 in federal and state tax relief as well as additional state tax credits like the Homestead Property Tax Credit and the Home Heating Credit.

“We are pleased to play a role in helping Michigan families receive money through this program that provides a real value to their households and the communities we serve,” said David Mengebier, Consumers Energy’s senior vice president for governmental and public affairs. **“Free tax preparation through the Michigan Economic Impact Coalition is one of many economic building blocks that makes our state stronger.”**

Consumers Energy’s \$150,000 contribution comes from a donor-advised fund established by its parent company, CMS Energy.

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In 2015, more than 105,000 Michigan taxpayers used a free tax service, saving more than \$14.6 million in tax preparation fees. Studies show that unnecessary high-cost tax time products, like refund anticipation loans, are disproportionately used by low-income filers. Free tax services, like those offered by MEIC members, help Michigan taxpayers avoid these unnecessary, and often predatory, products.

In addition to helping individuals claim tax credits and save money on tax preparation fees, free tax preparation services also help improve the local communities they serve by keeping more tax dollars in the local economy. A 2009 report by the Anderson Economic Group found that every dollar of federal EITC brought into a community in Michigan generates \$1.67 in new economic activity as taxpayers spend money from their tax refunds in their local community to purchase necessary household items, make needed repairs to the family car or get caught up on bills.

All taxpayers are encouraged to go to www.MichiganFreeTaxHelp.org in advance of filing their taxes this year to receive valuable information regarding federal and state tax credits and to see if they are eligible for free assistance in filing their federal, state and local taxes. The website is maintained by the MEIC, a statewide coalition of organizations, individuals and elected officials committed to helping financially empower Michigan families through outreach on available tax credits and refunds, financial education, asset building and free tax preparation services. MEIC members connect Michigan workers with free services and volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) sites which save working families money on tax preparation fees and connects them to other quality, low-cost financial services to help increase their financial security.

Even if they are not otherwise required to file, eligible EITC or Home Heating Credit filers must file a tax return and specifically claim the credits. Taxpayers in Michigan have several options for free help determining their eligibility and claiming credits. They can go to a VITA or TCE (Tax Counseling for the Elderly) site or prepare their own taxes using a free internet-based tool with assistance from a VITA volunteer either in person or over the phone.

To help accurately determine eligibility and prepare returns at a free tax site, individuals should bring:

- Photo proof of identification
- Social Security cards for themselves, their spouse and dependents or Social Security number verification letters issued by the Social Security Administration
- Birth dates for all persons listed on the tax return
- Wage and earning statement(s) Forms W-2, W-2G, and 1099-R, from all employers
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099)
- Copies of last year's federal and state returns, if available
- Bank routing and account numbers for direct deposit of their refunds
- Other relevant information about income and expenses
- Amounts paid for day care, if applicable and the day care provider's identifying number.

To electronically file their returns and get the fastest refunds, both spouses must be present to sign joint returns.

To locate a volunteer income tax assistance site in Michigan, or connect with volunteer assisted self-preparation tools, visit www.MichiganFreeTaxHelp.org or call Michigan 2-1-1.

The MEIC, a program of the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM), unites individuals, organizations and local initiatives committed to supporting tax credit and asset building opportunities for Michigan families through improved access to free, quality, income tax preparation assistance. MEIC members work to improve outcomes for families, workers and children by linking free tax preparations services with opportunities to build assets, savings and achieve financial security. CEDAM is a nonprofit membership organization that represents hundreds of individuals and organizations committed to revitalizing and rebuilding Michigan through community economic development. For more information about CEDAM, visit cedam.info For more information about the MEIC, visit cedam.meic.info.

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