

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE AT WILL

LEGAL SERVICES URGES LOW-TO-MODERATE INCOME PEOPLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FREE TAX PREPARATION SERVICES

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EDISON – With the April 18 tax filing deadline fast approaching, Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) is urging low-to-moderate income residents to avoid paying private tax-preparation firms by instead taking advantage of completely free available services.

According to Marcia E. Suarez, attorney with LSNJ's Tax Legal Assistance Project, "People should be aware that if they make less than \$54,000, they likely qualify for free tax preparation by trained professionals," including programs known as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Free File.

VITA services are offered in most of the state's 21 counties and often are located in local libraries. For more information about the VITA program residents can call 1-800-TAX-1040 or visit <http://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep>. It is recommended that people make the contact as soon as possible since appointment slots fill up quickly.

Free File is an IRS program that gives people free tax software to prepare returns. The link to that service is www.irs.gov/FreeFile.

Additionally, people may call LSNJ's Low Income Tax Clinic at 1-888-LSNJ-LAW weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p. m.

LSNJ has updated information about filing your 2016 taxes on <http://www.lsnjlaw.org/Taxes/Current-Tax-FAQs/Pages/2016-Tax.aspx> and also has produced a video series in English and Spanish to inform people — including those who are not citizens or do not have green cards — about filing tax returns and avoiding problems with the Internal Revenue Service. The videos can be seen by going to www.LSNJLAW.org/videos and clicking on the “taxes” tab.

Suarez, the LSNJ attorney, noted that too often people in lower income households don’t know about the free tax preparation services and wind up in many instances needlessly paying for private services. Nationally, she said, the average cost for preparing an individual IRS 1040 tax return runs more than \$200.

“This is a significant amount of money and a hardship for those struggling to make ends meet. But it can be avoided by contacting the free services.”

Meanwhile, she advises that even people who are under the income threshold for filing returns may want to file so they can collect any refunds due them or claim certain tax credits, including the earned income tax credit.

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Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) heads the state’s Legal Services system, a network of six independent non-profit corporations beginning its 50th year of providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through offices in all 21 counties.

Having provided representation more than 2.4 million cases since its inception in 1966, Legal Services has accumulated extensive information and broad perspective on the causes, extent, and responses to poverty. LSNJ constantly searches for insights concerning actions that reduce and ameliorate poverty, and thereby reduce the legal and other problems of those who live within poverty’s grasp.