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Governor Announces Free Income Tax Assistance Available Through the Ohio Benefit Bank

Columbus, Ohio – Ohio Governor Ted Strickland announced today that the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives has launched a statewide effort to provide free federal and Ohio income tax return assistance to Ohioans with household incomes below \$54,000 per year.

The assistance is offered through The Ohio Benefit Bank – a free service that provides help for low and moderate-income Ohioans to claim tax credits and other work support benefits.

“Completing a tax return can often be a complex and time-consuming process. That’s why I encourage Ohioans who need assistance to take advantage of the Benefit Bank’s tax preparation services,” Strickland said. “Benefit Bank counselors stand ready to help families with their taxes as well as determine their potential eligibility for additional benefits.”

The Ohio Benefit Bank is offered through a public-private partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks and more than 400 faith-based, non-profit, governmental and private-sector partners.

Trained counselors are currently staffing more than 120 Benefit Bank sites and clinics across the state to help prepare and file federal and Ohio income tax returns at no cost to eligible Ohioans. Free income tax assistance is also available through an online, self-service program at **www.OBB.Ohio.Gov**. Ohio public libraries are also partnering with the Benefit Bank to provide internet access and encourage individuals to utilize the online program.

Ohioans can also check potential eligibility for other work support benefits such as health care coverage, home energy assistance, child care subsidies and food stamps at Benefit Bank sites and clinics or online.

To identify tax assistance services available in local communities or to get additional information on the Benefit Bank, please call **1-800-648-1176** or visit **www.OBB.Ohio.Gov**.

In less than 18 months of operations, the Benefit Bank has helped more than 7,500 Ohioans claim more than \$9 million in tax credits and other work supports.

However, more than \$1.6 billion dollars in tax credits and other supports go unclaimed by eligible Ohioans who do not apply. More than 95 percent of these unclaimed funds are federal dollars. This includes more than 165,000 Ohioans who do not claim the Earned Income Tax Credit.