

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE AT WILL

LEGAL SERVICES' BILINGUAL VIDEOS DETAIL FREE TAX SERVICES FOR POOR PEOPLE

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EDISON – With the April 15 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 and instead take advantage of completely free services available to them.

That is one of the main recommendations in a newly-produced LSNJ 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.

According to Marcia E. Suarez, attorney with LSNJ’s Tax Legal Assistance Project, too often people in lower income households don’t know about the free federal income tax services and wind up paying for such services needlessly. Nationally, she said, the average cost for preparing an individual IRS 1040 tax return for 2015 runs more than \$250.

“This is a significant amount of money and a hardship for those struggling to make ends meet. People have to know that if they make less than \$54,000, they likely qualify for free tax preparation by trained professionals.”

In that regard, the LSNJ videos succinctly offer this advice: “Keep your Money.”

The videos cite two free services available for poor people — 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>.

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

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

The LSNJ videos offer information about the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, known as an ITIN, which is needed by people who are not citizens and do not have Social Security numbers. In the absence of a Social Security number, tax returns must include an ITIN. Details on how to apply for an ITIN are spelled out. Under the law, anyone who has income of certain amounts must file a return, even those who are not citizens or do not have green cards. The IRS maintains ITINs are only for tax purposes and promises not to voluntarily share an individual's ITIN information with other governmental agencies, including immigration authorities.

ITINs have very limited uses beyond tax returns and opening a bank account. They may not be used to collect public benefits, such as Social Security, welfare and food stamps.

The videos detail who must file a tax return and note what options are available for those who cannot pay what they owe.

Even people who are under the income threshold for filing returns still may want to file so they, for example, 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 in 2.36 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.