



# EAST RIVER DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

## PRESS RELEASE

### NYC Council Speaker Quinn, Council Member Van Bramer, Council Member Vallone Jr., and East River Development Alliance Encourage New Yorkers to Use Free Tax Sites

ERDA Tax Filers Open Savings Accounts at the ERDA Federal Credit Union,  
Get Screened for Public Benefits, and Access Other ERDA Services

For Immediate Release: March 21, 2012

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**LONG ISLAND CITY, QUEENS**— On Wednesday, March 21, at 11am, Speaker Christine Quinn, Council Member Van Bramer, and Council Member Vallone Jr. will join the East River Development Alliance (ERDA), ERDA clients, and community leaders at ERDA's Free Tax Prep site at 12-15 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue to encourage New Yorkers to take advantage of ERDA's free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites – and other sites citywide – and potentially receive thousands back in their tax returns.

Free VITA sites enable qualified working families and individuals to take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefit – which provides a particularly important lifeline in tough economic times. Typically, any family with children who have a 2011 income of less than \$50,000 and single filers making less than \$18,000 qualify for the EITC. ERDA offers free tax preparation services for low-income New Yorkers at both its Queensbridge and Astoria Houses offices.

“More New Yorkers should be taking advantage of ERDA's free tax preparation services,” said **City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. “Families have seen thousands of dollars in tax returns, whether it goes into a college fund or is used to put food on the table for your family, that money received and the money saved by using ERDA's free services provide New Yorkers with more opportunity. I want to thank Bishop Taylor and ERDA for their work through the years.”

“Each year, ERDA helps public housing residents get back over a million dollars in returns,” said **Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer**. “By keeping the community at the heart of its services, ERDA has become a prime example of a local institution which empowers its community by both educating its residents and offering programs that matter when it comes to improving the fabric of the neighborhood. Maximizing the amount of money people receive is at the heart of this invaluable program. Every dollar counts.”

**Council Member Peter F. Vallone Jr.** stated, “There's no way around it – tax season is upon us and a little help goes a long way. ERDA is offering more than just a little help – they're providing free tax preparation services

for our hard working families. Our residents can soon be eligible to receive substantial returns – making it a win, win.”

Since ERDA’s Free Tax Prep Site opened in late January, expert preparers have filed over 800 tax returns for community members, effectively securing over \$1.2 million – more than half of this in the EITC alone – for low-income filers in the community. Since 2005, ERDA’s free tax preparation program has secured over \$14 million for close to 8,000 individuals in its community.

**Bishop Mitchell Taylor, East River Development Alliance President and Founder**, commented, “ERDA is committed to ensuring residents of public housing can achieve self-sufficiency and economic mobility. For the past seven years, we have provided free, expert tax preparation assistance for low-income members of our community. I am also proud that all our clients have access to screening for public benefits onsite, referrals to all ERDA programs, and can immediately become members of the ERDA Federal Credit Union. In fact, we are offering free accounts at the ERDA Federal Credit Union for our tax prep clients today!”

According to the IRS, one in five taxpayers who are eligible for the EITC do not file for it. ERDA’s expert tax preparers work with community members to ensure that those who are eligible for the EITC receive their full tax return. Community members who file their taxes at ERDA’s free VITA site are also screened for income supports, and connected to ERDA’s many other services such as the Financial Fitness and Workforce Development programs. Many tax filers have also taken advantage of the ERDA Federal Credit Union by opening a savings account and directly depositing their tax return.

**ERDA Client Melissa Quan** stated, “I received \$7,000 in state and federal taxes back, which is very beneficial to me and my family. I will use some of this tax refund to pay my daughter’s college tuition. ERDA has a great atmosphere, and this tax preparation service is very helpful and convenient because it is located in my neighborhood and they offer access to other supports which my family needs – such as Food Stamps and medical coverage, and even employment services.”

"IRS Partners like the ones at the East River Development Association are the heart of the program," said **IRS New York Territory Manager, James Duffy**. "They provide a vital service in Long Island City preparing free tax returns and informing taxpayers about special tax credits for which they may qualify such as Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and the Child and Dependent Care Credit," Duffy said.

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### ***About the East River Development Alliance***

*The mission of the East River Development Alliance (ERDA) is to provide residents of four public housing neighborhoods in Western Queens – Queensbridge (the largest public housing community in the nation), Astoria, Ravenswood, and Woodside – with the tools and resources needed to achieve economic mobility and self-sufficiency, and to break intergenerational cycles of poverty. ERDA achieves these objectives through four integrated, comprehensive, and long-term programs which serve over 4,500 individuals per year and are anchored by the ERDA Federal Credit Union: employment services, financial empowerment services (including one-on-one financial education and counseling, comprehensive public benefits access and tenant advocacy), college access and youth development, and community economic revitalization. More information at [www.erdalliance.org](http://www.erdalliance.org).*