

# METRO HARTFORD

## Parents Scrambling To Meet Federal Tax Rules

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COURANT STAFF WRITER

Hartford parents and guardians have been scrambling for the past few weeks to get signed affidavits from their children's schools to help them claim the federal earned income tax credit.

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"We've been inundated with requests," said Terry D'Italia, spokesman for the Hartford school system. The affidavits are such a hot item because they're one of the acceptable forms of documentation required of many residents for a new Internal Revenue Service test implemented in and around the city this tax season.

The test, announced by the IRS in November, affects about 4,200 people in Hartford and 4,200 in surrounding towns. The 8,400 people chosen are required to prove through affidavits or letters from clergy or schools that the children they care for live with them for more than half the year in order to receive the tax credit, which is designed to reward low-income people who work.

Although thousands of Hartford residents are eligible for the tax credit, traditionally many Hartford residents have not taken advantage of it, leaving an estimated \$2 million to \$6 million out of Hartford families' hands and out of the Hartford economy, Mayor Eddie A. Perez has said.

A number of free tax clinics are being held in the city as Friday's tax filing deadline approaches to encourage as many city residents as possible to apply for the tax credit. But earlier in the tax season, some Hartford residents were having difficulty obtaining the necessary documentation.

"People have been having trouble getting affidavits from schools, which is what worries us," Jim Horan, executive director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services. "There's been a lot of frustrated and angry parents."

D'Italia said that principals had been reluctant to sign anything at first because they were advised by city lawyers that unless they had personal knowledge that students lived with the guardian asking for the documentation, they might be exposing themselves to personal liability. However, D'Italia said Corporation Counsel John Rose Jr. recently updated his instructions to school principals, allowing them to feel more comfortable providing the documentation.

City officials, who are suing the IRS

over the test, and social service workers had been concerned that the test would keep people from applying for the tax credit.

While the schools are reporting many parents and guardians requesting the signed affidavits, people working at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites throughout the city have had a different experience.

Most of the free tax sites have not seen many people selected for the IRS test coming in for help, organizers of the clinics say. The Hartford Public Library Upper Albany Branch, the Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative, and Mi Casa on Park Street have received a number of clients.

"We should've gotten more people, and we haven't," Horan said. He said the

lack of people may be a result of residents going to tax preparers such as H&R Block, or it may be because the new IRS test is keeping people away.

"We think people are avoiding it," said Tim Cole of Co-opportunity, which is coordinating the Hartford EITC initiative. "It's a minority of people who understood what they needed to do and did it. ... A lot of people are just confused and frustrated; that's what we've been hearing."

"Some people get the letters but don't really read them," said Jim Pestana from the Community Renewal Team, which has also offered free tax clinics.

Cole says that the IRS has not released the number of Hartford residents who have produced the additional documentation and applied for the tax credit.

"It's the question everyone wants an answer to, but nobody has the numbers yet."

However, Horan says there have been 2,160 total returns filed through the free tax clinics so far, and he expects that number will rise by the end of the tax season to roughly match last year's total count of 2,500 returns.

The IRS says the goal of this new test is to find out whether a new policy such as this one would deter a large number of people in a single community from applying for the tax credit or whether a large social services network, like the one in Hartford, can effectively help wary residents get through the additional paperwork. IRS officials said the test is needed to cut down on payments made in error due to fraud or unintentional mistakes by people claiming the credit.

Ramon De Jesus of Hartford said he has had difficulty providing the IRS with proper documentation of his children for years. When De Jesus and his girlfriend had their first daughter together, he tried to claim her on his income taxes for 2000, but later received a letter saying they were investigating his case since he had never filed for the Earned Income Tax Credit before. The IRS eventually asked him for a letter from his daughter's Hartford school, although the school was reluctant about giving letters out. De Jesus says he eventually was able to get one because he personally knew a teacher who taught at the school.

De Jesus says he was finally approved for the tax credit after sending in the letter from his daughter's school. "It's frustrating," said De Jesus. "I know people who don't live with their kids, don't support their kids, and they get no hassles. ... They're not denying me, they're denying my kids. They're telling me I'm not a father, and that hurts."

### Area Sites

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance clinics in Greater Hartford will be open through Friday. The first four are operated by the Hartford Asset Building Collaborative and the remainder are provided by the Community Renewal Team. All sites provide free tax preparation for residents who meet income guidelines.

■ Capital Community College  
950 Main St., Hartford  
860-906-5181

Hours: Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

■ Coalition to Strengthen the Charter Oak Neighborhood  
34 Sequassen St., Hartford  
860-509-3706  
Tuesday and Wednesday from 2 to 6

p.m.

■ Mi Casa  
510 Park St., Hartford  
860-522-5222

Tuesday and Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m.;  
Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

■ Village South  
331 Wethersfield Ave.  
860-297-0598, Ext. 795

Monday and Wednesday from 5 to 8 p.m.

**Community Renewal Team sites**

■ 1229 Albany Ave. (Lower Level),  
Hartford

860-560-5128  
Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to  
noon and 2 to 3:30 p.m.

■ 842 Park St., Hartford  
860-560-5782

Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to  
noon and 2 to 3:30 p.m.

■ 395 Wethersfield Ave.

860-560-5783

Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9  
a.m. to noon and 1 to 3 p.m.

■ 555 Windsor St., Hartford  
860-560-5750

Tuesday and Thursday from 2 to 5 p.m.

■ Sanser Mill  
282 Main St. Ext., Middletown  
860-347-4465, Ext. 227

Monday from 1 to 3 p.m.; Wednesday  
from 9 a.m. to noon and 4 to 8 p.m.;  
Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Walk-ins accepted  
on Friday.

■ Connecticut Training Center  
Goodwin College  
1137 Main St., East Hartford  
860-622-0766, Ext. 241

Tuesday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

■ Manchester Human Services  
479 Main St., Manchester  
860-647-3095

Wednesday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.