

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF SECOND HARVEST FOODBANKS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

JANUARY 9, 2012

OHIOANS CAN FILE TAXES FOR FREE USING THE OHIO BENEFIT BANK™ *Free Tax Assistance Available for Most Households Earning Less than \$60,000 Annually*

COLUMBUS – Tax season is quickly approaching and thousands of Ohioans will soon begin filing to ensure they receive their refunds quickly. To help taxpayers save a little extra money this year, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks (OASHF) is once again helping moderate- and low-income Ohioans obtain free federal and state income tax assistance, while also identifying if they are eligible for other benefit programs.

Beginning January 17, 2012, Ohioans with an annual household income of \$60,000 or less can file their federal and state taxes for **free** using The Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB™), an online service that connects Ohioans to benefit programs, such as health care coverage, home energy assistance, child care subsidies and food assistance.

“Too many Ohio taxpayers miss out on receiving free tax assistance each year because either they don’t know it’s available or they don’t know where to get this valuable service,” said Jason Elchert, OASHF deputy director. “At a time when many Ohioans are stretching every penny in their pocket as far as possible, the OBB can help working individuals and families maximize their full tax refund.”

Individuals can obtain free tax assistance by visiting The OBB’s free online, self-service program at www.ohiobenefits.org or by calling 1-800-648-1176 to talk to a live operator for assistance. The website is designed to help individuals and families prepare and electronically file their taxes as well as enable Ohioans to claim all the tax credits for which they are eligible at no cost while reviewing potential eligibility for other benefit programs. If clients choose to use direct deposit, they can receive their refunds in as few as seven to 10 days.

In addition, more than 3,500 trained OBB counselors, located at more than 1,100 locations across the state, are available to help Ohioans file their tax returns at no cost. Tax returns in many instances are a great way for working families and individuals to put thousands of dollars in their pockets and infuse money into their local economies.

“At least one in every four taxpayers eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit fails to claim the credit,” said Elchert. “The EITC could put more than \$5,800 into the pockets of eligible Ohio taxpayers. This is money that taxpayers can use now to make their lives a little easier or money they can put away for a rainy day.”

Each year, more than \$2.24 billion dollars in tax credits and other supports go unclaimed by eligible Ohioans. More than 97 percent of these unclaimed funds are federal dollars. Claiming these dollars will bring more federal money to Ohio, therefore helping to boost the state’s economy. Through The Ohio Benefit Bank, more than 273,000 Ohioans have gained access to potential tax credits and work supports valued at more than \$577 million.

To locate an OBB site or to access the online self-service program, visit www.ohiobenefits.org or call 1-800-648-1176. To stay connected online, follow The Ohio Benefit Bank on Twitter at @OhioBenefitBank or like The Ohio Benefit Bank on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ohiobenefitbank, both being great ways you can get updates and information throughout tax season about tax filing events throughout Ohio, savings tips and helpful tax information!

About the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks

OASHF is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2011, OASHF and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 150 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow @OASHF on Twitter and stay connected on Facebook at www.facebook.com/oashf.

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