

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **Governor Whitman and NBA Hall-of-Famer Willis Reed Team up to Promote Earned Income Tax Credit**

With the April 15 tax-filing deadline approaching, Governor Christie Whitman joined NBA great Willis Reed to urge low and moderate-income working families to apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit when they fill out their 1998 federal income tax returns.

Gov. Whitman and Reed, a former Knicks basketball star and member of the NBA Hall of Fame, will star in television public service announcements as part of a major public awareness campaign to increase awareness of the tax credit.

"Every family who didn't claim the Earned Income Tax Credit last year lost out on checks from Uncle Sam that averaged \$1,400," Governor Whitman said. "That means about \$100 million in tax refunds didn't come to deserving families in our state and didn't come back into our economy to create jobs."

It is estimated that up to 20 percent of the New Jersey qualifying working families earning less than \$30,000 annually do not apply for this credit because they do not know about it. That means that as much as \$100 million in rebates (entirely federally funded) due New Jersey's working families are going uncollected. That's \$100 million that should be coming into the State to support working families, to reduce reliance on public assistance and to bolster the State's economy.

Leading the campaign is the State Department of Human Services; the Association for Children of New Jersey, Public Service Electric & Gas Company and the Internal Revenue Service. As the private sector partner in the campaign, PSE&G; has funded the printing of 200,000 flyers and 300,000 envelope inserts distributed with utility billing notices and through state and local agencies.

"Working families who earned less than \$30,000 last year are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit," the Governor said. "Even if a wage-earner doesn't owe federal income tax, Uncle Sam may owe that person money."

The EITC is for low and moderate income working people who meet citizenship or residency requirements. The credit may be up to \$341 for persons without a qualifying child; up to \$2,271 with one qualifying child; and \$3,756 with two or more qualifying children.

"Qualifying child" includes children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and adopted children that lived with a taxpayer for more than half the year, must be under age 19, or under 24 if they are full-time students. Totally and permanently disabled children of any age also qualify.

For more information on the EITC and on free tax return preparation assistance, New Jersey residents can call the IRS at 1- 800-829-1040.

