



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 6, 2021

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### **Alameda County Offers Tax Filing Assistance to Santa Rita Jail Inmates**

Volunteer Tax Preparers Help Ensure Eligible Incarcerated Individuals Receive Stimulus or Economic Impact Payments

Dublin, CA — Eligible inmates at the Santa Rita Jail will receive professional tax preparation assistance through a new partnership between the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and the Alameda County Social Services Agency (ACSSA). Tax filing assistance resulting from this collaborative effort will help ensure that eligible incarcerated individuals receive Stimulus or Economic Impact Payments approved by the Trump and Biden administrations.

Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act ("CARES Act") in March 2020, and the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law March 11, 2021. Both Acts provide emergency relief payments to eligible tax-filers. Earlier in the year, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) blocked CARES Act payments to prisoners. That prompted a class action lawsuit on behalf of incarcerated people, arguing that the IRS rule was arbitrary and unlawful. A federal court agreed and ruled that the IRS may not deny CARES Act Economic Impact Payments to anyone solely because they are incarcerated [*Scholl v. Mnuchin*, No. 20-cv-5309-PJH (N.D. Cal.), *appeal docketed*, No. 20-16915 (9th Cir.)]. The judge ruled that the CARES Act had no language restricting payments to prisoners, and the administration could not create such restrictions arbitrarily. The government was ordered to issue the checks.

"Many of our inmate population are unsentenced and non-convicted individuals who filed tax returns prior to incarceration," notes Gregory J. Ahern, Alameda County Sheriff. "We understand that many of our inmates are entitled to tax refunds due to COVID Relief legislation. Our Inmate Services Unit will assist our population to file their taxes as we have for many years. These monies are in fact owed to our inmates just like other members of the community. This program will help support children and families while those eligible people are in custody."

Launched on April 26, 2021, the program will be operational through May 14, 2021. The two County agencies have collaborated to ensure that eligible Santa Rita inmates have access to professional tax preparation assistance provided by the ACSSA's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

The program is designed to provide tax assistance by phone to inmates who have completed a 1040 tax form and want to make sure they have filled out the tax document properly before filing with the IRS. Additionally, if an inmate is in the process of filing a tax return and has questions on how to complete the form, they can contact the tax assistance line for guided instructions. The tax assistance line is available to inmates on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and some Fridays from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., until May 14, 2021. Inmates are provided a completed 1040 tax return template to use as a guide in completing their return, a list of Frequently Asked Questions, and other supportive tax filing materials developed by VITA Program Coordinators to assist tax-filers through the tax completion process.

“I view this collaboration as an extension of the work that the ACSSA’s VITA program provides to tax filers throughout the tax season,” says Lori A. Cox, Director of the ACSSA. The VITA program ensures that people who cannot afford to pay for professional tax preparation services receive services at no cost. We want to provide the same opportunity for Santa Rita inmates.”

Tax assistance is provided by phone by IRS-certified advanced tax preparers. All services are voluntary, and calls are taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

The efficacy of this pilot program will be evaluated at the end of the tax filing period to determine if similar services are offered or expanded next tax season.

