



August 23, 2017

Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen  
30 Schuyler Place, Second Floor  
Morristown, NJ 07960

Dear Congressman Frelinghuysen,

Unlike most who face tax season with dread, an army of volunteers across New Jersey is eager each year to provide free tax preparation services to hardworking neighbors struggling to make ends meet.

These IRS-certified volunteers, prepared and dispatched through the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program – VITA – are trained in the pre-season and then show up days, nights, and weekends over four months to help families meet their tax obligations.

VITA serves families in poverty and those considered ALICE, (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), defined as earning above the poverty level, but not affording the basics. **New Jersey continues to see the number of those struggling to afford the high cost of living to nearly 40 percent of all households at 1.2 million.** Of that total, nearly 824,000 households are considered ALICE.

The commitment shown by VITA volunteers comes from knowing they are putting food on someone's table, paying a heating bill or filling a costly prescription by saving individuals the average \$260 it costs to get expert tax preparation services.

But their impact is even greater. **They're also pumping millions back into local communities and economies to the tune of \$2.2 billion nationwide** as tax returns are used to afford child care, pay down debt, buy a home and save for the future.

These civic-minded volunteers and the nonprofits leading these programs are more than doing their part. We are asking Congress to recognize this dedication by protecting and shoring up VITA to address the growing need at the same time funding threats loom.

Our 14 local United Way organizations respectfully request New Jersey's Congressional delegation fight to:

- **Boost funding for VITA from \$15 million to \$30 million in Fiscal Year 2018**
- **Co-sponsor the VITA Act through S797 or H.R.2901, making VITA a permanent matching grant program**

The return on investment is indisputable. In New Jersey this year, VITA volunteers helped to secure \$50 million in refunds. This includes the \$23 million in refunds that United Way's VITA sites secured for families across 15 counties, as well as \$6 million in Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) and \$1.8 million in Child Tax Credits (CTC).

The federal support represents only a fraction of the cost for the nonprofits running VITA sites. While the volunteers aren't paid, there are costs for recruitment, training, and supervision, as well as the equipment and space needed to execute this vital service. And there is the cost of community outreach.

VITA was already under attack to cut the appropriation in half. We are grateful that it was restored to flat funding. **Congress can do better.**

See the work of these volunteers and honor them by matching their commitment. Working together to help individuals and families succeed grows stronger local communities and a nation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Emge', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

John Emge

President, United Ways of New Jersey

*Vice President & Regional Executive Director*

*United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey*

cc: Bergen County's United Way  
United Way of Central Jersey  
United Way of Bloomfield  
United Way of Essex and West Hudson  
United Way of Gloucester County  
United Way of Greater Mercer County  
United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey  
United Way of Greater Union County  
United Way of Hudson County  
United Way of Hunterdon County  
United Way of Monmouth and Ocean Counties  
United Way of Northern New Jersey  
United Way of Passaic County  
United Way of Salem County