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## Many in S. Florida don't take tax credits

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The Earned Income Tax Credit provides federal income tax deductions for the working poor, yet an estimated 25 percent of all eligible families do not claim the money each year. Timed with today's release of Florida's Self Sufficiency Report, the Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign is launching an EITC awareness campaign in Miami-Dade, where more than \$200 million set aside for about 120,000 low-income families remains unclaimed.

"The money's there to be had," said Mike Dobzinski, spokesman for the South Florida District Internal Revenue Service office. "Our job is to get people to claim it, and claim it the right way."

The EITC is calculated on taxpayers' federal income tax return, and can ultimately reduce the amount owed or increase the amount refunded.

The IRS estimates that in 1999, some 123,500 families in Miami-Dade County were eligible for EITC funds but did not claim the credit, leaving \$202 million unclaimed. That same year, some 85,000 eligible families in Broward County did not claim their credit, leaving \$99 million in the IRS' coffers.

"We discovered that especially here, with the high immigrant community, a lot

of workers are just not educated about the EITC," said Joe Grimes, the coordinator for the Greater Miami Prosperity Campaign, which is working with the Human Services Coalition of Dade County and local politicians to make low-income workers and their employers aware of the credit. "There's also a lot of fear about being too open and too free with conversations about the government, that's a real inhibitor."

The EITC eligibility limits in 2001 were \$28,281 for a taxpayer with one child, \$32,121 for a taxpayer with more than one child, and \$10,710 for a single taxpayer. In Miami-Dade County, the average EITC credit was \$1,635 for 1999; in Broward County, it was \$1,161.

"My sense from the business community is that people are not aware about the EITC," said Peter Roulhac, chairman elect for the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, which is backing the EITC awareness campaign. "I certainly hope people pay attention."

For more information on the Earned Income Tax Credit, call the Human Services Coalition of Dade County at 305-576-5001 or the IRS at 1-800-829-1040.