

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2023**

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SENATE BILL 736

Short Title: Expand Income Tax Assistance in NC. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Mohammed, Robinson, and Smith (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

April 10, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM AT NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO EXPAND INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE IN THE STATE AND TO PROVIDE FUNDS TO THE UNITED WAY OF NORTH CAROLINA TO EXPAND ITS VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Whereas, it is estimated that 225,000 North Carolina filers are eligible for the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit but do not claim the credit; and

Whereas, it is estimated that the average Earned Income Tax Credit is about \$2,300 per filer; and

Whereas, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides a federal program, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, for which grants are available. VITA provides for individuals who make below a certain income threshold per year to have their taxes completed by an IRS certified individual for free, allowing them to take full advantage of every federal tax credit and return more of North Carolina's hard-earned dollars to our citizens, putting more money into our economy; and

Whereas, community colleges can provide work-based learning opportunities for students; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I. GRANT PROGRAM AT NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO EXPAND INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE IN THE STATE

SECTION 1.(a) Program Established. – Within the funds appropriated in subsection (d) of this section, the State Board of Community Colleges shall establish a grant program for participating community college campuses to offer courses to students to become tax preparers as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program and to facilitate providing VITA services to all students on campus, as well as community members. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) offers free tax help through VITA to (i) people who generally make sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) or less, (ii) persons with disabilities, and (iii) limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. The goal of the grant program shall be for community colleges to provide work-based opportunities to students while facilitating access to the VITA program for their local communities.

SECTION 1.(b) Components of the Program. – In administering the grant program, the State Board of Community Colleges shall require participating community colleges to do at least the following:

- (1) Offer the following courses to students interested in becoming certified as tax preparers for the VITA program:



1 a. A fall curriculum course for the purposes of teaching basic tax
2 accounting and training students on the preparation of federal and
3 North Carolina tax returns. The course shall lead to the completion of
4 the IRS Link and Learn training to become certified as tax preparers
5 for the VITA program.

6 b. A spring work-based learning course where students commit to 15
7 hours per week from January through April 15 to prepare taxes.

8 (2) Designate a faculty champion to facilitate the program.

9 (3) Provide VITA services to be offered to all students on campus as well as
10 community members.

11 **SECTION 1.(c)** Applications for Grants. – A community college shall apply for a
12 grant to the State Board with a plan to implement the VITA program on its campus with at least
13 the following information:

14 (1) A time line for implementing the curriculum and a recruitment of students to
15 become certified as VITA tax preparers.

16 (2) Options for paid work-based opportunities for students as part of the spring
17 curriculum. Students shall be provided hourly compensation for tax
18 preparation assistance during tax season as part of the program.

19 (3) Start-up and ongoing costs for personnel, including site coordinators and
20 quality reviewers, and budget for continuing costs for running the VITA
21 program.

22 **SECTION 1.(d)** Appropriation. – There is appropriated from the General Fund to
23 the Community Colleges System Office the sum of one million three hundred four thousand one
24 hundred dollars (\$1,304,100) in nonrecurring funds and five hundred seventy thousand one
25 hundred dollars (\$570,100) in recurring funds for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to implement the
26 grant program in accordance with this act. The funds shall be used as follows with any
27 unexpended funds returned to the System Office:

28 (1) For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the sum of seven hundred fifty-five thousand
29 one hundred dollars (\$755,100) in nonrecurring funds may be used for
30 creation of the curriculum, for bonuses of up to one thousand five hundred
31 dollars (\$1,500) per community college receiving a grant to support a faculty
32 champion on campus, to support hiring personnel for the VITA program, and
33 to establish work-based learning opportunities for students.

34 (2) For the 2023-2024 fiscal year and for subsequent fiscal years, five hundred
35 seventy thousand one hundred dollars (\$570,100) in recurring funds may be
36 used to support hiring personnel for the VITA program and to establish
37 work-based learning opportunities for students. The System Office may use
38 up to fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) of the recurring funds appropriated for
39 the program each fiscal year for administrative costs associated with
40 administering the grant program.

41 **SECTION 1.(e)** Of the nonrecurring funds appropriated to the Community Colleges
42 System Office in subsection (d) of this section for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the sum of up to
43 five hundred forty-nine thousand dollars (\$549,000) shall not revert at the end of the 2023-2024
44 fiscal year but shall remain available until the end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year to provide bonuses
45 of up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00) per community college receiving a grant to support a
46 faculty champion on campus, to support hiring personnel for the VITA program, and to establish
47 work-based learning opportunities for students.

48 **SECTION 1.(f)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
49 Revenue the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) in nonrecurring funds and one hundred
50 thousand dollars (\$100,000) in recurring funds for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to provide training
51 and technical assistance to community college campus personnel and students participating in

1 the grant program in accordance with this act. The Department of Revenue may use the funds
2 appropriated pursuant to this section to contract with a third-party vendor to provide technical
3 assistance and support for the program.
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5 **PART II. FUNDS TO THE UNITED WAY OF NORTH CAROLINA TO EXPAND ITS**
6 **VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

7 **SECTION 2.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Office of State
8 Budget and Management the sum of eight hundred forty thousand dollars (\$840,000) in
9 nonrecurring funds for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to be allocated as a directed grant to the United
10 Way of North Carolina to expand its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. These
11 funds shall be used to increase the number of VITA locations, provide dedicated staff to support
12 evaluation of the program and recruitment, provide needed software and office supplies for the
13 program, and improve marketing and communication efforts to include multilingual materials,
14 connection to online resources where internet is available, and educational opportunities on
15 household budgeting, financial planning, and other resources to improve financial skills. These
16 funds shall not revert at the end of the 2023-2024 fiscal year but shall remain available until the
17 end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year.
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19 **PART III. EFFECTIVE DATE**

20 **SECTION 3.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2023.