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TAXPAYER ALERT:

Don't Pay to Borrow Your Own Money

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Choose Tax Filing Options VERY Carefully

With some tax preparers, you will end up with **less of YOUR money** and they will end up with **more of YOUR money**. Here are some things to watch for:

Rapid Refund and Quick Cash Loan Schemes

Stay away from tax preparers who promise "fast cash refunds," "express money" or "instant refunds." If you fall for one of those promises, you will be borrowing your own money at a very high cost. Typically, such "instant" or "quick refunds" will cost you between $30 and $90 on top of other fees. The interest rate you will be paying to will probably be from 60% to more than 700%. If your refund is denied or is smaller than expected, you still owe the whole amount that you "borrowed" to the refund lender.

Refund Down-Payment Offers

Don't let a car dealer, furniture or jewelry store or payday lender prepare your taxes and use your tax refund for a purchase or advance. You will be agreeing to a loan. As with the "fast check refunds," "instant refunds" or "express money" deals, you will pay high tax preparation fees, high loan fees and still other fees.

Be Patient and Keep More of Your Own Money

If you wait a short time, you will get your refund directly from the Internal Revenue Service and it won't cost you a dime extra. **Get free tax help** from the IRS or at a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) site. Phone First Call for Help at 211 or call 1-800-829-1040 for information. If you are a senior, call 1-888-227-7669 for the closest AARP tax aide site. At some of these places, you can file your tax return electronically and get your refund deposited in your bank account within about 10 days.

If you go to a tax preparer, go to one who is reputable, has a permanent office and still will be there if your tax return is audited. Check the preparer out with the Better Business Bureau. Make sure you understand what you are signing and what you are getting for your money. If there are mistakes on your return, you—not the preparer—are responsible for them.

If the IRS disputes your return or says you didn't file and you are a low-income person, call The Legal Aid Society office closest to you: Ashtabula County Legal Aid at 440-576-8120 or toll free 1-866-873-9665; Cuyahoga County at 216-687-1900 or toll free 1-888-817-3777; Lake or Geauga County at 440-352-6200 or toll free 1-888-808-2800; Lorain County at 440-323-8240 or toll free 1-800-444-7348.