

State of Kansas, H&R Block Unveil New Program to Expand, Simplify Access to Food Assistance Benefit for Underserved Families

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Three Metro Counties are First in State to Employ H&R Block's Benefits Enrollment Network to Help More People Access Food Assistance Benefits

KANSAS CITY, Mo.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan. 2, 2007--Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) and H&R Block (NYSE: HRB) have joined forces to help more eligible Kansas families get faster, easier access to its Food Assistance Program (also known as Food Stamps). The program represents the first time at a state level that such a partnership has been created. The program will enable people to electronically apply for the Food Assistance benefit through more than 45 H&R Block tax offices in three metro area counties.

"Access to healthy, nutritious food isn't always easy for many low-income families," stated Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius. "There are nutrition assistance efforts out there, but the application process can be daunting and many families are missing out as a result. This partnership with H&R Block will help change that and give more families the assistance they're eligible for," said Sebelius. "Plus, streamlining the application process is a great addition to our efforts to make government operate more efficiently making it so we can deliver more services with less overhead."

Currently, the State of Kansas estimates that, while nearly 31,000 people in Johnson, Wyandotte, and Leavenworth counties receive food assistance each month, there are more than 24,000 individuals who are likely eligible but not enrolled in the program largely due to challenges with awareness, accessing applications and understanding the basic guidelines for eligibility. The state's Food Assistance benefit averages over \$4,000 per year for a family of four.

The H&R Block Benefits Enrollment Network (BEN) program will be piloted in Johnson, Wyandotte, and Leavenworth counties beginning in January of 2007. During tax preparation by H&R Block, potentially eligible individuals will be offered the assistance of specially-trained benefits specialists, at no additional charge, who can then guide them through the benefits application process. The application, along with supporting documentation, will then be sent electronically to the state where an SRS case worker manages the remainder of the process. Follow-up and resolution of the application process can take place by phone or in person at a county office.

"H&R Block is in a unique position to help our clients receive all the benefits to which they are entitled," said Mark Ernst, chairman and chief executive officer of H&R Block. "We have been expanding our ability to serve as our clients' tax and financial partner for the last several years and this partnership with the State of Kansas represents a new chapter in this effort. We are proud to be partnering with the State of Kansas through Governor Sebelius' leadership," continued Ernst. "With the Benefits Enrollment Network, H&R Block improves upon its mission to help people get the support they need to improve their financial situations and build better lives for themselves and their families."

The Kansas Food Assistance Program is a nutrition assistance benefits program which allows eligible people to purchase nutritious food from their local grocery stores. SRS reports show that only 64.5% of Kansans who are eligible for the program currently participate (there are approximately 182,821 persons currently participating). This leaves over 100,000 persons who could receive food assistance if they would apply, and the need is present in all areas of the State. For example, Johnson County, one of the most populous and wealthiest counties in the state, SRS data indicates over 24,400 potentially eligible individuals but only 39.7% of them participate in the program.

"Our goal is to change the equation across the state and our vision is for every eligible Kansas family to access every benefit they can, which in this case can mean up to \$4,000 a year in food assistance for a family of 4," said Don Jordan, Acting Secretary of Social and Rehabilitation Services for the State of Kansas. "Over the course of the next few months, we will work with H&R Block to measure the effectiveness of this program to determine its impact on Kansas families."

"It's about our clients. It's always been about how we can help," said Cheryl Boos, an H&R Block Tax Professional in Kansas City. "The Benefits Enrollment Network now allows us to help our clients even more. We are very excited about this opportunity and I know my clients will be too."

About H&R Block

H&R Block seeks to serve as its clients' tax and financial partner. Over the last several years the Company has developed and introduced numerous innovations to help working families choose healthier financial alternatives, get more of the benefits to which they are entitled and help create the ability for individuals and their families to become more financially secure and independent. H&R Block is the world's largest tax services provider. Having prepared more than 400 million tax returns since 1955 the company pioneered e-filing and consistently helps approximately 25 percent of those families who claim the Earned Income Tax Credit each year. In 2005, that represented over \$10 billion, an average of about \$1,800 per family.

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