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HOW MUCH WOULD A STATE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT COST IN 2010?

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The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is the nation's most effective anti-poverty program for working families, lifting 6.5 million people — including 3.3 million children — above the poverty line each year.¹ The 24 state-level EITCs modeled after the federal program complement it in combating poverty by reducing taxes for low-income people and providing incentives for work. It is important for policymakers considering a state-level EITC to know its budget cost; this can be estimated by using a simple three-step process outlined below.

Data Sources

The Center's methodology for estimating the cost of a state EITC employs two data sources. First, Internal Revenue Service data on the value of all federal EITC claims filed by residents of each state are used to determine the state's share of total U.S. EITC claims. The most recent full-year data, shown in the second column of Table 2, are for claims made for the 2007 tax year.²

Second, the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation's (JCT) projections of the future cost of the federal EITC provide a base for estimating the cost of a state EITC. For fiscal year 2010, the JCT estimates that the federal EITC will cost some \$54.1 billion, including both the tax expenditure (non-refundable) and outlay (refundable) portions, as shown in Table 1.³

Using these data, the cost of a refundable state EITC is relatively easy to estimate.

¹ Arloc Sherman, "Stimulus Keeping 6 Million Americans Out of Poverty in 2009, Estimates Show," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, September 9, 2009.

² All but a tiny fraction of federal EITCs for a given year are claimed and paid when taxes are filed in January through April of the following year. As a result, nearly all of the federal cost for tax year 2009 EITCs will be incurred in federal fiscal year 2010, which ends September 30, 2010. Similarly, in most states the cost of tax year 2009 claims will fall in the state fiscal year that ends in 2010.

³ The federal EITC for tax years 2009 and 2010 was expanded slightly in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, thereby slightly raising the cost; this impact is reflected in the data.

Step 1: Estimate the total value of federal EITC claims in a given state for a future fiscal year.

To estimate the total value of the federal EITC in a state in a future fiscal year, we first use the IRS data on EITC claims to divide the value of EITC claims in a given state by the value of all U.S. EITC claims. This percentage is the share of the federal EITC cost attributable to that state in the base year (2007). Then, to estimate the cost of the federal EITC in the state for a future year, we apply that percentage to the JCT’s projected total cost of the federal EITC for the chosen year. For example, for tax year 2007, Alabama EITC claims totaled \$1.22 billion, or 2.51 percent of the nationwide total. Assuming that Alabama’s share of federal EITC claims remains constant, Alabama’s federal EITC claims in fiscal year 2010 would be 2.51 percent of \$54.1 billion, or \$1.36 billion, as shown in the fourth column of Table 2.

| TABLE 1: PROJECTIONS OF FEDERAL EITC COST | |
|--|-------------|
| Fiscal Year | Cost |
| 2008 | \$48.6 bil. |
| 2009 | \$50.6 bil. |
| 2010 | \$54.1 bil. |
| 2011 | \$51.9 bil. |
| 2012 | \$49.7 bil. |
| Sources: Joint Committee on Taxation, Estimates of Federal Tax Expenditures for Fiscal Years 2008-2012, and Estimated Budget Effects Of The Revenue Provisions Contained In The Conference Agreement For H.R. 1, Fiscal Years 2009 - 2019; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. | |

Step 2: Multiply the expected value of the state’s federal EITC claims by the percentage at which the state credit is to be set.

Most states’ EITCs provide benefits as a set percentage of what the federal program pays. This percentage ranges from 3.5 percent to 40 percent, depending on the state. To estimate the cost of a state EITC, multiply the federal EITC cost for the state, as determined in Step 1, by the percentage at which the state EITC is to be set. This calculation yields an estimate of what the state credit would cost in a given fiscal year if everyone who received the federal credit also received the state credit.

Step 3: Adjust the estimate for the fact that not all federal EITC claimants will claim the state credit.

In practice, a substantial portion of those who receive the federal EITC fail to claim state EITCs. This is especially true in the first few years after a state credit is enacted, when awareness of it may be limited.⁴ In addition, some eligible families have the IRS compute their federal credit and may not receive a state EITC if the state does not compute the state credit amount for them. For these and other reasons, the cost of a refundable state EITC in its initial years is likely to be lower than the full cost of the federal credit multiplied by the state percentage. To account for this, the cost estimate should be reduced by at least 10 percent.

⁴ Compared to the cost each state would have incurred if every family claiming the federal credit also claimed the state credit, the actual cost of a newly enacted state EITC in its first year of availability was about 81 percent in Vermont, 83 percent in New York, 85 percent in Wisconsin, 88 percent in Oklahoma, 90 percent in Kansas and Minnesota, 91 percent in Colorado, and 97 percent in Massachusetts. In the second year of availability in each state, the cost in Vermont rose to 85 percent, the cost in New York rose to 90 percent, and the cost in Minnesota rose to 93 percent relative to the full-participation cost.

The Results

The estimated fiscal year 2010 costs to states of implementing a refundable EITC for tax year 2009 set at 5, 10, or 20 percent of the federal credit are shown in the last three columns of Table 2. Other percentages may be calculated based on those numbers (for instance, the cost of a 15 percent credit would be one-and-a-half times the cost of a 10 percent credit) and the methodology outlined above may be used for other years using the projections of federal cost presented in Table 1.

None of these figures includes the costs of changing tax forms to include a space to claim an EITC or the costs of processing and administering EITC claims; these are likely to increase the overall cost of the credit by less than 1 percent. The estimates presented here apply only to credits that are refundable and that are set at a flat percent of the federal EITC.

Further information on these estimates and on methods of estimating the costs of non-refundable credits and different credit structures may be obtained from the staff of the State Fiscal Project at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Information on the policy implications of state EITCs may be obtained by reviewing the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities publication, *A Hand Up: How State Earned Income Tax Credits Help Working Families Escape Poverty*, available on the Center's website, www.cbpp.org.

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED COST OF REFUNDABLE STATE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

| State | Amount of Federal EITC Claims, TY 2007 (\$ millions) | Percent of Total U.S. EITC Claims, TY 2007 | Estimated Cost of Federal EITC in FY 2010 (\$ millions) | Estimated Cost of State EITC in FY 2010 | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| | | | | Set at 5% of Federal Credit* (\$ millions) | Set at 10% of Federal Credit* (\$ millions) | Set at 20% of Federal Credit* (\$ millions) |
| Alabama | 1,221 | 2.51% | 1355 | 61 | 122 | 244 |
| Alaska | 70 | 0.14% | 78 | 4 | 7 | 14 |
| Arizona | 924 | 1.90% | 1026 | 46 | 92 | 185 |
| Arkansas | 638 | 1.31% | 708 | 32 | 64 | 127 |
| California | 5,311 | 10.90% | 5893 | 265 | 530 | 1061 |
| Colorado | 530 | 1.09% | 588 | 26 | 53 | 106 |
| Connecticut | 333 | 0.68% | 370 | 17 | 33 | 67 |
| Delaware** | 122 | 0.25% | 135 | 6 | 12 | 24 |
| Florida | 3,580 | 7.35% | 3972 | 179 | 357 | 715 |
| Georgia | 2,220 | 4.56% | 2463 | 111 | 222 | 443 |
| Hawaii | 165 | 0.34% | 183 | 8 | 16 | 33 |
| Idaho | 215 | 0.44% | 239 | 11 | 21 | 43 |
| Kentucky | 735 | 1.51% | 815 | 37 | 73 | 147 |
| Mississippi | 945 | 1.94% | 1049 | 47 | 94 | 189 |
| Missouri | 942 | 1.93% | 1045 | 47 | 94 | 188 |
| Montana | 137 | 0.28% | 152 | 7 | 14 | 27 |
| Nevada | 351 | 0.72% | 390 | 18 | 35 | 70 |
| New Hampshire | 116 | 0.24% | 128 | 6 | 12 | 23 |
| North Dakota | 72 | 0.15% | 80 | 4 | 7 | 14 |
| Ohio | 1,697 | 3.48% | 1883 | 85 | 170 | 339 |
| Pennsylvania | 1,560 | 3.20% | 1730 | 78 | 156 | 311 |
| South Carolina | 979 | 2.01% | 1086 | 49 | 98 | 196 |
| South Dakota | 108 | 0.22% | 120 | 5 | 11 | 22 |
| Tennessee | 1,238 | 2.54% | 1374 | 62 | 124 | 247 |
| Texas | 5,368 | 11.02% | 5956 | 268 | 536 | 1072 |
| Utah | 292 | 0.60% | 324 | 15 | 29 | 58 |
| Virginia** | 1,028 | 2.11% | 1141 | 51 | 103 | 205 |
| West Virginia | 281 | 0.58% | 312 | 14 | 28 | 56 |
| Wyoming | 58 | 0.12% | 64 | 3 | 6 | 12 |
| Other | 50 | 0.10% | 55 | 2 | 5 | 10 |
| States That Have Enacted Refundable EITCs | | | | | | |
| District of Columbia | 92 | 0.19% | 102 | | | |
| Illinois | 1,895 | 3.89% | 2,102 | | | |
| Indiana | 934 | 1.92% | 1,036 | | | |
| Iowa | 342 | 0.70% | 379 | | | |
| Kansas | 358 | 0.74% | 398 | | | |
| Louisiana | 1,216 | 2.50% | 1,349 | | | |
| Maine | 163 | 0.34% | 181 | | | |
| Maryland | 693 | 1.42% | 769 | | | |
| Massachusetts | 593 | 1.22% | 658 | | | |
| Michigan | 1,457 | 2.99% | 1,616 | | | |
| Minnesota | 523 | 1.07% | 581 | | | |
| Nebraska | 225 | 0.46% | 249 | | | |
| New Jersey | 1,007 | 2.07% | 1,118 | | | |
| New Mexico | 414 | 0.85% | 459 | | | |
| New York | 3,142 | 6.45% | 3,486 | | | |
| North Carolina | 1,762 | 3.62% | 1,955 | | | |
| Oklahoma | 660 | 1.35% | 732 | | | |
| Oregon | 443 | 0.91% | 491 | | | |
| Rhode Island | 141 | 0.29% | 156 | | | |
| Vermont | 66 | 0.13% | 73 | | | |
| Washington | 694 | 1.42% | 770 | | | |
| Wisconsin | 606 | 1.24% | 672 | | | |
| U.S. Total | 48,712 | 100.00% | 54,049 | | | |

* Estimates of state EITCs assume participation rate equal to 90% of federal participation.

** Delaware and Virginia already offer non-refundable credits. Since the cost shown is the total cost of a refundable credit, the added cost of making the credit refundable in these states would be substantially less.

Source: State claims taken from IRS Statistics of Income Bulletin, Tax Year 2007: Historical Table 2, Jan 2008. FY 2010 cost calculated based on Joint Committee on Taxation estimates of federal tax expenditures.