



April 1, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: RIDE Budget- AOP

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association of Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our strong support for increasing the allocation of funding to the Auditory Oral Program (AOP) housed at Paine Elementary School in Foster. This program represents a vital investment in ensuring that students who are deaf or hard of hearing have equitable access to a high-quality education grounded in the auditory-oral philosophy.

The AOP plays a critical role in supporting students and families by providing specialized instruction, speech and language development, and access to highly trained educators and support staff. For many students, this program is the bridge that allows them to fully engage in their education, build communication skills, and participate meaningfully in their school communities. Ensuring that this program is adequately funded is essential to maintaining these outcomes and expanding opportunities for the students it serves.

Increased funding will help ensure that the program has the necessary staffing, resources, and instructional supports to meet the growing and complex needs of its student population. It will also allow the program to continue delivering individualized services and maintaining the high standards that families across Rhode Island rely upon. Without sufficient investment, AOP risks being unable to sustain the level of service that students deserve and are entitled to receive.

We also recognize that programs of this nature require ongoing collaboration among educators, specialists, and families. Sustained and enhanced funding will support this collaborative model and ensure that educators have the tools and professional capacity needed to deliver effective, evidence-based instruction aligned with students' individualized education plans.

With that in mind, we strongly support increased investment in the Auditory Oral Program and appreciate the Committee's attention to ensuring equitable access to specialized educational services. This is a common-sense and necessary step toward strengthening supports for students who rely on this program and the dedicated educators who serve them. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to support increased funding for the AOP at Paine Elementary School.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued commitment to Rhode Island's students and educators,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini".

Alexander Lucini
Government Relations Director, NEARI