

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee, Rep Craven and Rep Casimiro,

I am writing as a parent, involved citizen, and business owner to respectfully urge your support for continued funding of the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP). This is for support of H7011.

Our family has directly experienced the impact of this program. Our son, Luke, is a bilateral cochlear implant user, and the foundation he received through an auditory-oral approach was critical in helping him develop speech, listening skills, and the ability to engage meaningfully in a mainstream classroom environment. This was not just educational support, it was life-changing and could not have been replicated in standard public or private settings.

From a fiscal standpoint, eliminating this program would create greater long-term costs for the state along with strain on local governments. Without RIAOP, many children would be placed into school systems that are not adequately equipped to support auditory-based learning. This would require additional resources, specialized staffing, and potentially more intensive interventions later on. These resources would not be shared or centralized and cause a large gap in services. Thus, negatively impacting the trajectory of the entire student population due to the reduction in resources. Investing early through a proven, specialized program like RIAOP is both more effective and more cost-efficient.

There is also a broader strategic concern. Neighboring states like Massachusetts have made significant advancements in providing diverse and comprehensive services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Without maintaining programs like RIAOP, Rhode Island risks falling further behind and limiting options for families who are seeking the best outcomes for their children.

It is important to recognize that not all deaf or hard-of-hearing children have the same needs. For children like our son, who have access to sound through cochlear implants but are still learning how to interpret and function within a hearing world, an auditory-oral approach is essential. Alternative models that rely solely on sign language do not provide the same level of speech and listening development, and as a result, can leave these children without the tools they need to fully integrate and thrive in broader society.

If RIAOP were to close, families like ours would lose access to a critical pathway, one that bridges the gap between hearing and understanding, and allows children to build independence, confidence, and opportunity.

We respectfully ask that you consider both the human and financial impact of this decision and support sustainable funding for RIAOP.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrew Therrien

Dad of Luke, an amazing kid that just happens to be deaf.

North Kingstown Resident

Owner – Brand Management Partners, LLC

Owner – Ascenda Sales Group, Inc

Vice President of Business Development – Samplers, Inc