

February 17, 2026

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Beth Ranaldi, and I have served as an Auditory-Oral Teacher of the Deaf since 1998. I spent 12 years at the Clarke School for Hearing and Speech in Canton, Massachusetts, and for the past 15 years I have worked with the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP) in Foster, Rhode Island. I am writing to express my strong support for Joint Resolution H7011, which appropriates funding for the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP).

Over the course of my 27-year career teaching deaf and hard of hearing children to listen and speak, I have seen firsthand how critical this unique program is for Rhode Island families. Early hearing screenings, combined with advanced hearing technology such as cochlear implants and hearing aids, have profoundly changed the trajectory of children's lives. With appropriate intervention and support, children with hearing loss can develop spoken language, access their education alongside their peers, and thrive in their communities.

Our team of professionals at the RIAOP work closely with children and their families including several auditory oral teachers of the deaf, oral language facilitators and an auditory-oral speech-language pathologist. Our students receive intensive auditory, speech, and language intervention from our speech therapist who specializes in listening rehabilitation, as well as daily support from auditory-oral educators in classrooms from Pre-K through high school in house and throughout the State. If students need occupational therapy and physical therapy they receive those services as well. Our team also meets with an educational audiologist to evaluate our students in a self contained and regular education setting. We also serve social emotional needs within our school day taking groups of students with hearing loss and their age matched hearing peers. In addition, our psychologist helps evaluate students to meet eligibility every 3 years. For more than 20 years, this listening and spoken language option has been available to families in Rhode Island who choose this approach for their children.

Rhode Island is fortunate to have skilled cochlear implant surgeons (ENTs) and educational audiologists who work with children who have cochlear implants and hearing aids. The expertise is here. What we need is consistent funding to ensure that students experience no interruption in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and maintain continuity in the specialized therapies they depend upon. Programs like RIAOP give families the opportunity to help their children lead full, independent, and successful lives.

The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program is a crucial statewide educational program whose mission is: “To prepare children with hearing loss for an education in their community schools by providing them with the tools they will need for successful inclusion and achievement, while striving to empower their families with the knowledge and confidence necessary to support their children in their lifelong journeys.”

As an Auditory-Oral Teacher of the Deaf, I have witnessed the meaningful impact this program has on children and families across the state. I have seen students enter our program as toddlers with minimal access to sound and grow into confident, articulate young people who participate fully in their neighborhood schools. I have supported families who were initially overwhelmed by a diagnosis of hearing loss and watched them gain confidence as their children developed strong listening and spoken language skills. RIAOP does more than provide services—it builds futures.

This funding will directly support the program’s mission and ensure that families who choose a spoken language modality for their children continue to have access to high-quality services that are not readily available elsewhere in Rhode Island. I respectfully urge the Committee to approve the proposed appropriation and to consider structuring the funding in a way that allows RIAOP to receive sustained annual support beyond the 2026–2027 school year.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Ranaldi

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