

February 18, 2026

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

I am writing to express my strong support for Joint Resolution H7011, which appropriates funding for the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP). I respectfully urge the Committee to consider that this funding be provided in a manner that allows for the RIAOP to continue receiving annual support beyond the 2026-2027 school year.

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 a CODA, a mother of a hard of hearing daughter, and now grandmother of a bilaterally deaf, two year old little girl, I have seen firsthand the impact spoken words have and will have, on deaf and hard of hearing children, and families, across Rhode Island. My granddaughter was born, as my father was, one hundred percent deaf in both ears. My daughter was born deaf in her left ear, and partially deaf in her right ear. RIAOP was not established when she was in grade school. She struggled throughout her academic career despite having speech therapy and a 504 plan. Had she gained the skills and received the support that students from RIAOP have today, she may not have suffered the negative socioemotional effects that she did. Instead, she had to work twice as hard to graduate high school and college. My father graduated from Rhode Island School for the Deaf in 1958, but has lived with speech issues since birth because he has never heard a sound. I want more for my granddaughter. Since she was implanted at age ten months, she was already one year behind children born with normal hearing. With weekly speech therapy, she has flourished to her speech age level. There is so much more that needs to be done! The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program has always been the goal, once she turns three in December. At that point, she can begin to attend the AOP, so when she enters Kindergarten, she will be equal to her peers.

This funding will directly support the Program’s mission of supporting families who choose a spoken language modality for their children and allow it to continue delivering high-quality services that are not readily available elsewhere in the state.

I respectfully urge you to support this resolution and approve the proposed appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program.

Sincerely,
Debra Batchelor
Grandmother of a future AOP student
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