

4/27/26

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 parent of a deaf child in Rhode Island, I have seen firsthand the meaningful impact this Program has on children and families across Rhode Island. My son Luca is eight years old and was born with profound hearing loss. He received bilateral cochlear implants at 14 months old and spoken language is his preferred form of communication. He received intensive speech therapy through Early Intervention and routine mappings in Connecticut on a bimonthly basis.

When he was transitioning from Early Intervention to Preschool, I assumed he would automatically be eligible to attend the Auditory/Oral program. However, our school district in Coventry did not feel that he needed this program, and believed that he should be mainstreamed. I hired an educational lawyer to help navigate the school and IEP system, advocating for Luca to get the services he needed to succeed in school.

It was not until his second year of Preschool were we afforded the opportunity to visit the school, which was amazing. Having teachers and SLPs that understand hearing loss in a small and quiet environment that was conducive to supporting children who are still learning how to listen while also learning in the classroom gave the children the confidence and support to succeed.

At that point in Luca’s education, he was already immersed in a typical classroom, but if he was afforded the opportunity to be in this classroom as he was beginning preschool, having that initial year or two of that quiet listening environment would have set him up for even more success. Luca is doing well in school with the support of a teacher of the deaf from the Auditory program and a speech language pathologist who took the time to

learn about Luca's hearing loss and how best to serve him, but it is a struggle for him every day.

**The auditory oral program helps children like Luca learn how to listen in a classroom, which is something that their hearing peers will never understand or have to struggle with.**

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,

Emma Musco, LICSW

Board Member of RI Hands and Voices

Mother of deaf child in RI

Coventry, RI

401-699-7135

[Emwhite1123@gmail.com](mailto:Emwhite1123@gmail.com)