

4/20/25

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 child served by the program and a public school educator, I have seen firsthand the meaningful impact this program has on children and families across Rhode Island. My daughter, Nairobi, was born hard-of-hearing. After being informed of her disability, I immediately assumed she would not have a good quality of life or access to equitable education. Thankfully, a family friend, whose daughter was fortunate enough to attend the RIAOP, informed me of this amazing program. I listened to their stories of everything she was able to accomplish. I was amazed by the clarity and precision of her speech and the level of education she achieved despite her disability. It was evident that the program had provided intense speech therapy sessions and that her teachers (specialized teachers of the deaf) were dedicated to providing her with the necessary support. When Nairobi entered the program at 3 years old, she was only able to say a handful of words; her speech level was that of a 1 year old. By the end of her first year at RIAOP, Nairobi was speaking in full sentences and could clearly communicate her needs. I was finally able to communicate with my daughter and have more meaningful conversations. Today, nearing the end of her second year at RIAOP, Nairobi is able to hold full conversations with everyone around her. She is able to advocate for herself when she needs help with her hearing aid or cochlear processor. She is able to communicate when she has not clearly understood what was said and politely asks for repetition. The foundational skills my daughter has acquired thanks to the dedicated teachers and staff at RIAOP will surely play a role in her academic success moving forward.

In my experience as a public school educator for the past 8 years, the types of services and classroom settings provided by RIAOP are not available in other schools. Teachers of the deaf and sound systems essential for her language acquisition are not readily available at public school settings. The services listed in my daughter's IEP will not be provided. The closure of RIAOP will interrupt the services of students at their physical site as well as those around the state that benefit from their services.

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,  
Genesis Terrero  
Parent and Educator  
Cranston, Rhode Island  
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