

New England Center for Hearing Rehabilitation

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To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House Committee on Finance:

We are writing as co-owners of the New England Center for Hearing Rehabilitation to express our strong and unequivocal support for the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP) and to urge you to support legislation establishing sustainable, long-term funding for this essential program.

As clinicians who work closely with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families, we have had the privilege of collaborating with the RIAOP team for many years. Through this partnership, we have seen firsthand the extraordinary impact the program has on children's ability to develop listening and spoken language skills, achieve academic success, and fully participate in their communities.

Although hearing loss in children is relatively low-incidence, it is highly complex and requires a level of specialized expertise that is not widely available in traditional educational or clinical settings. Effective intervention depends on deep knowledge of auditory development, hearing technology, and spoken language acquisition. The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program brings together this rare and critical expertise in a coordinated, collaborative model that cannot be easily replicated. This concentration of skill and experience is precisely what allows children with hearing loss to reach their full potential. One example of many is "Mark", a child that is thriving in school, fully included with his peers, requiring minimal services because of the aggressive early interventions that he received through the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program.

The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program provides a highly specialized, evidence-based educational and therapeutic environment that is not otherwise available statewide. Its comprehensive model—serving children from early intervention through school age, and extending into outreach services—ensures continuity of care and consistent support during the most critical periods of language development.

Early, specialized intervention for children who are deaf or hard of hearing is not only educationally and clinically effective—it is also fiscally responsible. When children receive appropriate services during the critical early years of brain and language development, they are far more likely to develop age-appropriate communication skills, access general education settings, and require fewer long-term supports. This reduces the need for more intensive and costly services later in their academic careers and beyond. In contrast, delayed or insufficient intervention often leads to significantly higher educational and social costs over time.

Without continued and stable funding, the loss of the RIAOP would create a significant and immediate gap in services for children across Rhode Island. Families would face limited or fragmented options, and many children would lose access to the specialized support necessary to develop spoken language and succeed academically. From both a clinical and public health perspective, this would represent a substantial setback.

We strongly support the proposed legislation to establish a sustainable funding model for the program, similar to that of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Ensuring equitable access to appropriate educational services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing is not only a matter of educational policy, but also one of fairness, inclusion, and long-term societal benefit.

We respectfully urge the Committee to advance this legislation and help secure the future of this vital program. The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program is an invaluable resource, and its continued operation is critical to the children and families it serves.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to the children of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Cox, Au.D.

Co-Owner

New England Center for Hearing Rehabilitation

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Co-Owner

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