

April 28, 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 parent of a child served by the Program, I have seen firsthand the meaningful impact this Program has on children and families across Rhode Island. My son Benjamin is deaf and has bilateral cochlear implants. He was enrolled in Early Intervention from birth, but the nonspecialized language development services provided were not sufficient, and his language development was profoundly impaired. When my son was three, we worked with our school district to enroll him in the RIAOP Preschool program. After three years in their program, my son’s language development had exponentially risen. He attended a mainstream kindergarten class within the RIAOP program, and by first grade he was mainstreamed into our home district (Lincoln Public Schools).

Benji is now 13 years old and completing seventh grade at Lincoln Middle School. He is supported by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that includes consultation and support by a Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) from the RIAOP. His TOD provides consultation in the regular education setting regarding classroom acoustics, hearing loss, instructional strategies, academic support, curriculum modification and technology. She also conducts an annual staff training to address technology use and troubleshooting, the impact of hearing loss on educational success, and cochlear implant technology. She is the “go to” person for issues with his cochlear implant technology, as the personal FM system that is used to improve signal-to-noise ratios and ensure appropriate access to instruction frequently breaks down and requires trouble shooting or servicing that is beyond the scope of what mainstream teachers or support staff can do. It is essential that the FM system function properly for my son to hear teachers, support staff, and peers in the classroom.

Benji’s TOD from the RIAOP (Brianna Morin) is a critical and essential team member who helps all staff learn to successfully use and manage Benji’s technology, to implement his accommodations, and to develop comfort and expertise in educating a child with hearing loss in the mainstream setting. A great deal of Benji’s success has come from her support, consultation, and expertise in working with children with hearing loss and their teachers and staff. I have been deeply appreciative that Lincoln Schools contracts with this essential program for children with hearing loss who receive their education in the

mainstream and know that my son would not be successful in the mainstream setting without this essential support.

My son will soon transition to high school. It is critical that he continue to receive specialized auditory oral services throughout his educational progression. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Oliver, Ph.D.

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Lincoln, RI

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