

March 9, 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 an educator, as well as the godparent to a current student that receives services, Nairobi Saffron Castillo, I have seen firsthand the meaningful impact this program has on children and families across Rhode Island. RIAOP helped Nairobi "Saffy" excel academically despite her hearing impairment because of the unique setting this program provides (certified teachers of the deaf, classroom equipment and sound systems that help her acquire language, and a small group setting that minimizes the number of challenges deaf children are exposed to in larger "regular" school settings). This program provides Nairobi "Saffy" and many other deaf and hard of hearing children with the equitable education they deserve but that otherwise they would not receive if this Bill isn't passed. RIAOP is the only program of its kind in Rhode Island; its closure will affect these students' education drastically. Students who have a hearing impairment have every right to equitable access to receiving the services they need to accommodate them. Students should have access to the tools necessary for success and achievement. This should be important to everyone in Rhode Island.

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,

Marilyn Borbor

Academic Dean, Instructional coach, and colleague of a mother who has a child currently in the program

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