

Chris O'Brien

From: Melissa Zinni <mzinni8@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2026 3:06 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: SUPPPORT of H7011 - Making an Appropriation to the RI Auditory Oral Program

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April 28, 2026

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I submit this statement in 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 RIAOP provides highly specialized habilitative services that are essential for children who rely on hearing technology. While devices such as cochlear implants and hearing aids provide access to sound, they do not, on their own, enable a child to understand or use spoken language. These children must be explicitly taught how to listen, interpret auditory input, and develop meaningful speech and language skills. The RIAOP is uniquely designed to provide this through evidence-based, developmentally appropriate interventions.

I offer my personal experience as a parent of a child served by the RIAOP to emphasize the critical importance of these services. I have seen firsthand the meaningful impact this program has on children and families across Rhode Island. My son received a delayed diagnosis of hearing loss at the age of three. Prior to receiving cochlear implants at the age of four, he had no spoken language. Following implantation, it became clear that access to sound was only the first step. He required intensive, specialized intervention to learn how to process auditory information and translate it into functional communication. Through participation in the RIAOP, my son received the expert support necessary to develop listening skills, acquire language, and produce speech. The program's focus on teaching children how to hear, how to assign meaning to sound and how to use it expressively was foundational to his progress. The RIAOP provided the critical, time-sensitive intervention he needed to close the gap between his chronological age and his hearing age. Its impact has been profound. As a result of these services, my son has developed the ability to communicate effectively, engage academically, and participate more fully in his community. His progress reflects not only his effort, but the specialized expertise provided through the RIAOP intervention.

Funding for the RI Auditory-Oral Program is an investment in the long-term outcomes of children across Rhode Island. This program promotes communication independence, educational access and social integration, while reducing the need for more intensive services later in life.

I respectfully urge you to prioritize and support this resolution and approve the proposed appropriation to the RIAOP so that all children in Rhode Island who depend on hearing technology have equitable access to the services necessary to develop listening, speech and language skills that will shape the course of their lives and help them reach their full potential.

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

Respectfully,
Melissa Zinni