

February 12, 2026

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Nicole Poirier, and I am a resident of Richmond, Rhode Island (formerly Tiverton). I am an Auditory-Oral Teacher of the Deaf with five years of experience in Rhode Island and eight years in Massachusetts. I currently work with the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program. I respectfully submit my support for **H7011**, which would appropriate \$1,167,100 for fiscal year 2026–2027 to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important measure.

I strongly support this bill because it ensures equitable educational access for Rhode Island students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH). The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program prepares children with hearing loss for successful inclusion in their community schools by equipping them with the listening and spoken language skills they need to thrive, while also empowering families to confidently support their children. As the only program in the state serving children from birth through age 21 who use hearing technology (cochlear implants and/or hearing aids) and a spoken language modality, its role is both unique and indispensable. Without this funding, Rhode Island families who choose this communication approach would lose access to a critical educational pathway for their children.

I am not only an educator, but also an individual with hearing loss who understands firsthand what access to sound and language can mean over a lifetime. My ability to listen, speak, and fully participate in school and in my community did not happen by chance. It was made possible through consistent, specialized support from professionals trained to work with children who are deaf and hard of hearing. That support gave me the tools to develop spoken language, build confidence, and communicate independently in a hearing world. These skills shaped not only my academic success, but also my identity, independence, and future. Having walked both paths — first as a child who benefited from these services and now as a professional who teaches and mentors deaf and hard of hearing students — I can say with certainty that auditory-oral programs are essential. They open doors for children and provide access to opportunities that last a lifetime. Continued investment in this program is an investment in educational equity, inclusion, and long-term student success.

The Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program is a vital statewide program housed within the Foster School Department. It provides specialized auditory-oral instruction and intervention that enables children who are deaf and hard of hearing to develop spoken language through listening with their hearing technology. These services equip students with the communication, academic, and self-advocacy skills necessary for meaningful inclusion in their schools and communities. I respectfully urge you to support **H7011**, an appropriation for the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program, to ensure equitable access to specialized educational services for deaf and hard of hearing children across our state.

Thank you for your consideration,
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