

Patrick O'Connor

91 Fairfax Drive
Warwick RI, 02888
401-932-6636
pboconnor22222@gmail.com

17 February 2026

SUPPORT of H7011

Making an appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program

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 ensure that this funding structure allows 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.”

For the past seven years, I have been closely connected to the deaf and hard of hearing community through my partner. During that time, I have learned firsthand how vital appropriate educational support and advocacy are for long-term success. Now, as the father of a child who will be served by RIAOP beginning in the Fall of 2026, this issue is no longer just something I have observed, it is deeply personal. I understand how critical early, specialized intervention is in shaping a child’s academic trajectory and independence.

My daughter is profoundly deaf and has bilateral cochlear implants. We are currently navigating the important transition from Early Intervention into preschool services, and RIAOP represents the bridge that will allow her to build the listening and spoken language skills necessary to thrive in her community school. RIAOP provides specialized instruction, audiological support, and family-centered guidance that cannot be replicated in a typical mainstream setting without dedicated expertise. Without sustained legislative support for this Program, I am deeply concerned that children like my daughter who are bright, capable, and full of potential, will be placed in environments that are not equipped to meet their unique needs. This will increase the risk that they fall behind academically and socially. I respectfully urge you not to let this happen. We have worked tirelessly during my daughter’s (Cora) first two

years of life, hoping to give her the best chance at success. It has taken a lot of hard work and dedication through working at home as well as with resources provided by the state. Our speech therapists have done a tremendous amount of work with Cora, helping her to greatly exceed our expectations. Even with her great accomplishments, she is nowhere near ready to be sent to public schools on her own. RIAOP would be a crucial resource that we feel our daughter needs.

Most other families do not have the ability to provide their children with the same resources that we provided ours. We gratefully were able to keep Cora's mother home from work to spend as much time with Cora as possible. Other families must be extremely reliant on the resources provided by the state. Cutting funding for the RIAOP will be extremely detrimental to the deaf and hard of hearing children across the state. The consequences of these actions could result in these children living a life of struggle compared to a life of success. Children with Cochlear Implants and other hearing devices easily have the ability to match or even surpass skills of able bodied children. Depriving these children of the resources they need will be a great injustice to the Rhode Island Community.

This funding will directly support the Program's mission of assisting families who choose a spoken language modality for their children and will allow it to continue delivering high-quality services that are not readily available elsewhere in our state.

I respectfully urge you to support this resolution and approve the proposed appropriation to ensure that children like my daughter have access to the specialized education they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick O'Connor'. The signature is stylized with a large 'P' and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Patrick O'Connor