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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 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.”

I have seen firsthand the transformative impact this Program has on children and families across Rhode Island. As someone deeply connected to the deaf and hard of hearing community, this issue is both personal and urgent. I am the granddaughter of Rhode Island School for the Deaf alumna, I identify as deaf/hard of hearing myself, and I have seen how critical the right educational supports are for long-term success. Most importantly, I am the parent of a child who is scheduled to be served by RIAOP beginning in the Fall of 2026. I understand, both personally and as a parent, how essential early, specialized intervention is in shaping a child’s academic trajectory and long-term independence.

My daughter is profoundly deaf and has bilateral cochlear implants. We are currently navigating the critical 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.

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 ask for your support of this resolution so that the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program can continue providing critical services to children and families across our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Collins', with a stylized, cursive-like flourish.

Samantha Collins BSN, RN