

February 12, 2026

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Stephanie Rich, I am a resident of North Providence and a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) working for 11 years in Rhode Island. Currently, I am the SLP working for the RI Auditory Oral Program. I am writing in support of **H7011: Making an Appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program**. Thank you for the opportunity to share my view on this important piece of legislation.

I believe this bill will be beneficial to Rhode Island residents who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) and their families. The mission of the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program 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.” Currently, it is the only educational program specifically designed to support children age birth through 21 who use hearing technology (cochlear implants and/or hearing aids) who utilize a spoken communication modality (as opposed to American Sign Language, total communication, etc). Without this funding, this educational program would cease to exist, and thus, there would not be equitable educational options for D/HH Rhode Islanders who utilize this communication modality.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants do not restore normal hearing, but rather provide access to sound through artificial channels. Therefore, many children and adults who use hearing technology require aural habilitation from a qualified medical professional such as an SLP like myself, educational support from an Auditory Oral Teacher of the Deaf (an educator trained in the unique educational needs of D/HH students), technology support from Educational Audiologists, and training of regular education staff to implement vital accommodations all to simply access the same opportunities as their peers. The RI Auditory Oral Program currently meets all of these needs and more through a pre-k and elementary school educational program, early intervention services, and outreach services that service a large number of D/HH children who receive their education in their home schools. This allows *equitable* access to education for many D/HH Rhode Islanders.

I urge you to approve **H7011: Making an Appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program** to help provide equitable access to specialized educational services for D/HH children in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service,



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