

May 18, 2026

Dear Chair DePalma and Members of the Senate Committee on Finance,

I am writing to express my strong support for Joint Resolution S3083, 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.”

As an educator of many children served by the program, I have witnessed firsthand the meaningful impact this program has on children and families across Rhode Island. Having the RIAOP students in our classrooms has helped students develop greater empathy and a better understanding of students with different abilities. I feel the RIAOP program has fostered a community where differences are celebrated. Students with hearing loss bring unique perspectives and strengths to the classroom, which enriches the learning for everyone. Along with these positive effects, students with hearing loss have access to services available to all students, thus providing them with more equity of services. It has truly been a pleasure working with students from the AOP program, as well as with members of the RIAOP staff.

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. There is an inequity in funding among students with hearing loss using different forms of communication. The RI School for the Deaf is funded by the state, but the educational option for students using spoken language has a tuition. I feel strongly that there needs to be more equity in the funding.

I respectfully urge you to support this resolution and approve the proposed appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program.

Sincerely,

Danielle Ford

Grade 2 Teacher at Captain Isaac Paine School

Foster, RI

danielle.ford@paineschool.org