

May 18, 2026

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

I am writing to express my unwavering support for S 3083, which appropriates funding for the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program (RIAOP). I respectfully urge you to support this critical legislation to ensure that the RIAOP continues to receive annual state funding.

The RIAOP is the first and only program of its kind in Rhode Island. It is a vital 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 journey”. The specialized expertise and intensive instruction offered by the RIAOP cannot be replicated elsewhere in the state. For families who choose a listening and spoken language approach for their children, this program is essential.

I am an Auditory-Oral Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Warwick Public Schools. While many supports can be provided at the local level, some students require immersive auditory-oral instruction that is only provided at the RIAOP. I have witnessed firsthand the profound and lasting impact the RIAOP has on children with hearing loss and their families throughout Rhode Island. Our students who have attended the program receive the intensive support they need to develop listening and spoken language skills, become confident communicators and effective self-advocates as they transition back to their home schools and communities.

Supporting S 3083 is essential to addressing longstanding inequities in accessing and funding for educational programs serving children who are deaf or hard of hearing. While the Rhode Island School for the Deaf currently receives annual state funding, the RIAOP should also receive consistent state support. Passage of this legislation will help ensure that children with hearing loss and their families continue to have access to this invaluable program, which supports students throughout the state.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of S 3803 and approve the proposed appropriation to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program so that this critical program can continue serving Rhode Island families.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to equitable educational opportunities for children with hearing loss in our state.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Egan, M.S.Ed.
Auditory-Oral Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing