

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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House 7120, Article 7 The House Finance Committee State House – Room 35 April 12, 2006

Hello, my name is Steven A. Florio, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I have been serving on the Board of Trustees at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Philadelphia, PA since 1997 and I used to serve on the RISD Board of Trustees for two years. I am a parent of two deaf children under 2 years old. Their primary language is American Sign Language.

On behalf of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, we support the House Bill# 7120, Article 7, specifically on the funding for a new building for Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

According to the Rhode Island Department of Education information for the year of 2004-2005, there are 689 schools that include daycare centers, preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, training centers, and programs for children with disabilities. None of their buildings are designed specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students who require TOTAL communication access for better learning environment including visual and acoustic. Some of them do provide communication access but typically in several classrooms only instead of the whole building. Out of 690 schools in RI, only RISD is able to provide that kind of environment for the deaf and hard of hearing students but RISD never has had the right building that is designed specifically for this group of students. An example is making a public announcement. Most of 689 buildings have the speakers in each classroom. They are not beneficial to the deaf and hard of hearing faculty, staff, and students. The new building would have the closed circuit TVs in every room of the building for public announcement purpose so this way, all deaf and hard of hearing students, faculty, and staff will have access to the information. Also, existing federal laws such as the American with Disabilities Act and Individual with Disabilities Education Act have placed the certain rules to create a least restrictive environment for the deaf and hard of hearing students. With this new building designed and advised by a national known deaf architect, it would meet all federal building and accessibility requirements instantly. With your support on this bill, this new building will made enormous impact in many ways, not just K-12 deaf and hard of hearing students but also, deaf and hard of hearing faculty, staff, and community at large that they deserve a top quality school building and they could not find in the rest of 689 schools in Rhode Island.

Thank you,

Steven A. Florio
RI CDHH Executive Director

Data is obtained from RI Department of Education's website.

Schools for Children with Disabilities:	40
Catholic Schools:	53
Private/Independent Schools:	49
Private Schools/Educational Programs for Very Young Children:	199
State-Operated Schools including RISD:	7
Career and Technical Centers:	9
Public Schools (Elementary, Middle, and High Schools)	<u>333</u>
Total:	690