Hello and good morning Chairman Behning and the members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of House Bill 1283. My name is Jeanie Mitchell and I am a French teacher and Freshman Academy Leader at Penn High School in Mishawaka, Indiana, as well as a Teach Plus Indiana Teaching Policy Fellow. I am in my 12th year of teaching and my 2nd year as an academy leader.

Over the course of my career, I’ve come to understand the importance of fostering positive relationships with my students. But each year I encounter an increasing number of students of all abilities who are unable to cope and navigate stress, resulting in apathy, anxiety, and sometimes mental breakdown. I meet students like Jane. Jane is an outgoing junior who loves to make people laugh. That year, as finals approached, I led my class in a five-minute meditation. As we wrapped up with a short discussion on stress management, I overheard Jane talking with others about being so stressed she wanted to die. I followed up with Jane and was surprised to hear she meant what she said. She shared she felt extremely depressed but didn’t feel comfortable telling her mom. I never imagined that one day I’d be asking a seemingly happy junior girl if she felt she was in danger of hurting or killing herself, and that her answer would be yes. After calling Jane’s mother, who was also surprised by this revelation, I was left feeling completely numb. When I started having to refer young people for suicidal ideation, I realized how ill-equipped I was to navigate these situations.

Students have been bringing trauma to the classroom since formal education came into existence. I myself am a child of divorce who struggled academically and would have slipped through the cracks if not for dedicated teachers who believed in me. The good news is that research surrounding this reality for today’s students is catching up quickly. When I became an educator 12 years ago, my training did not include understanding and recognizing the effects trauma can have on the physical and mental development of children, let alone their academic performance in school. I was 11 years into my teaching career before I was even introduced to the concept of trauma and ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and their impact on child development.

Now, with my increased understanding of how trauma affects brain development, I reflect with regret on the students I was not better able to support over the years. There was a sophomore boy who was frequently absent to my class; I found out later that he was seeking extended psychiatric care and was too overwhelmed to attend school. There was the senior girl I assumed had senioritis, who in reality was struggling to keep up with her work because she was regularly taking her mom to receive chemo treatments for stage-4 breast cancer. Or Jane who was so ill-equipped to seek help for her depression that she was considering self-harm.

HB1283 strives to not merely add another requirement for incoming teachers, but to proactively equip them to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of Indiana’s students by making sure they’re knowledgeable about trauma, stress, and the power they have on students’ academic achievement.

In today’s world, teaching encompasses more than passing knowledge onto students. Each day we are asked to teach, and to step into the role of mentor, parent, and friend. This can become all the more emotionally taxing and overwhelming to balance when an educator is not trained to recognize and
navigate the difficult situations students are facing. Research has shown that the effects of trauma for students can be softened or even reversed through positive relationships with adults. Training incoming teachers in trauma-informed instruction and recognition will allow teachers to better meet their students where they are emotionally, while balancing high academic expectations.

I work in a school district that has rolled out districtwide trainings on trauma-informed care, restorative practices, and ACES. Our teachers requested this training to meet the immediate needs of our students in the district. Students like Jane. I believe this bill will help retain new teachers by better equipping and preparing them for the realities of the classroom and I want to thank Representative DeVon for authoring this bill. I support House Bill 1283 and hope you will consider supporting it as well. Thank you.