Testimony of Indiana Policy Fellow Sarah Medve before the House Education Committee in support of HB1066

January 22, 2020

Hello and good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in support of Amendment 15 to House Bill 1066. My name is Sarah Medve and I am an 8th grade mathematics teacher and middle school lead at Thomas Carr Howe Community High School on the eastside of Indianapolis. I am also a Teach Plus Indiana Teaching Policy Fellow.

I have been a teacher for three years now, and have worked at Howe my entire career. While many would consider me an early career educator, I am currently the most senior middle school teacher in my building. In fact, 80 percent of teachers in my school have less than five years of teaching experience, while 100 percent of the students we teach are economically disadvantaged.

On the first day of school each year, I task my students with writing a “beginning of year” letter to tell me about themselves and see what questions they have for me. When I first began this assignment three years ago, I was eager to find out what my students had written, to learn more about them. I remember opening up the first letter from a student named Cory that had nothing but a question written on it: “When are you going to quit on us?” Not “If” but “When.” Each letter I opened followed the same trend — one question, asked over and over.

Cory and his fellow students had grown used to watching teachers come and go from their classrooms, often being replaced by temporary substitutes or inexperienced teachers. In my short tenure, I have watched nine science teachers come and go from the classroom across the hall from me. My students have come to expect inconsistency in the classroom and teacher turnover and shortages have proven to be a direct barrier to our students receiving an equitable education.

I support the Amendment 15 to House Bill 1066 because it will allow our state to better track teacher supply and demand data, giving all Indiana stakeholders the opportunity to make more informed decisions. Filtering teacher shortage information by geographic area and district need will help to determine where best to allocate funds and allow school systems, state legislators, teacher prep programs, and educators the ability to predict and respond to supply and demand dynamics.

We need transparency and access to quality data to address the teacher retention crisis in Indiana. By better leveraging the current data management system to produce a publicly accessible, user-friendly data platform, we will position our state to continue to be competitive and appealing to teachers both in our state and our region. A 2019 Bellwether Report, Nuance in the Noise, makes the case for implementing robust data systems that better connect teacher supply and demand at the state level, leading to the creation of targeted policy to better address shortage. Indiana would be joining other states already implementing this type of tracking, including Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

My students, students like Cory, shouldn’t have to wonder as they enter school each day if they will have a teacher standing at the door waiting to wish them good morning. They should be able to focus on what they are learning and how to succeed in the world. To prepare all students for success and provide them with consistency, we must have teachers who are committed to staying in the classroom.
Increasing data transparency through improved tracking and public reporting will help our state better address the issues of teacher turnover and shortage. It will help break down existing barriers to an equitable education system. I want to thank the Committee for considering Amendment 15 to House Bill 1066. I believe this action will move our legislature in the right direction to continue improving teacher retention while also providing stakeholders with the necessary information to make informed decisions. I urge you to consider this amendment and take a step to better understand the state of the teacher turnover in Indiana. Thank you.