

ASSEMBLY, No. 5678

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 28, 2023

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman ALEX SAUICKIE

District 12 (Burlington, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes “Farm Mental Health and Financial Services Task Force.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



A5678 SAUICKIE

2

1 AN ACT concerning mental health and financial services for farmers
2 and persons working on farms, and supplementing Title 4 of the
3 Revised Statutes.

4
5 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
6 of New Jersey:

7
8 1. a. There is established a task force to be known as the
9 “Farm Mental Health and Financial Services Task Force.” The
10 purpose of the task force shall be to develop and maintain a list of
11 mental health and financial assistance services for farm owners and
12 operators, farm supervisors, and farm laborers in order to provide:

13 (1) support for their mental and psychological well-being; and
14 (2) financial services to navigate the business and financial
15 challenges of farm life that contribute to stress and affect mental
16 and psychological well-being.

17 b. The task force shall consist of five members, including the
18 Secretary of Agriculture and the Commissioner of Health, or their
19 designees, who shall serve ex officio, and three public members to
20 be appointed by the Governor, as follows:

21 (1) one public member who is a representative of a farmer
22 advocacy group;

23 (2) one public member who is a representative of a Statewide
24 banking association active in agricultural communities, and who
25 either has experience in providing financial services, or a firm
26 understanding of the financial services available, to farmers and
27 other persons working on farms in the State; and

28 (3) one public member who is a representative of a Statewide
29 mental health advocacy group, who is familiar with the mental
30 health providers and services that are available to provide
31 counseling and other mental health assistance to farmers and other
32 persons working on farms in the State.

33 c. Each public member of the task force, appointed pursuant to
34 subsection b. of this section, shall serve a term of three years,
35 except that, of the three public members first appointed pursuant to
36 subsection b. of this section, one shall serve an initial term of one
37 year, one shall serve an initial term of two years, and one shall
38 serve an initial term of three years. Vacancies in the task force
39 membership shall be filled in the same manner provided for the
40 initial appointments, and a public member may be reappointed to
41 the task force following the expiration of the member’s term.

42 d. The members of the task force shall serve without
43 compensation, but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses
44 incurred in the performance of their duties, within the limits of
45 funds appropriated or otherwise made available for the task force’s
46 purposes.

A5678 SAUICKIE

1 2. a. The task force shall organize, at the call of the Governor,
2 within 45 days after the appointment of its members, and shall
3 select a chairperson from among its three public members.
4 Thereafter, the task force shall meet at the call of the chairperson.

5 b. The Department of Agriculture and the Department of
6 Health shall provide professional and clerical staff to the task force
7 as may be necessary for its purposes. The task force shall also be
8 entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the
9 employees of any other State department, board, bureau,
10 commission, or agency, as it may require and as may be available
11 for its purposes, and to employ a secretary or other appropriate staff
12 member, who need not be a member of the task force, to provide the
13 task force with stenographic and clerical assistance.

14 c. Three members of the task force shall constitute a quorum
15 for the transaction of official business.

16

17 3. a. No later than 180 days after the task force's initial
18 organizational meeting, the task force shall:

19 (1) develop and publicize a list of mental health and financial
20 assistance services for farm owners and operators, farm supervisors,
21 and farm laborers, as well as information on the types and nature of
22 services available to such individuals in the State and the manner in
23 which such services may be accessed thereby; and

24 (2) study the means and methods that have been used by other
25 states and jurisdictions to facilitate and improve the mental health
26 and financial stability of farmers and other farm workers in those
27 jurisdictions, and develop recommendations for executive,
28 legislative, and other appropriate actions that could be undertaken
29 to better address these issues in New Jersey.

30 b. The list of mental health and financial assistance services
31 developed pursuant to subsection a. of this section, at a minimum,
32 shall include the available services identified by the task force to
33 date that may bolster the mental and psychological well-being of
34 farmers and other persons who own, operate, or work on farms in
35 the State, or that provide financial assistance, education, or
36 information to enable such persons to successfully navigate the
37 business and financial challenges of farm life that may contribute to
38 stress and affect their mental and psychological well-being.

39 c. The list of mental health and financial assistance services
40 developed pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall be posted in
41 a publicly accessible location on the Internet websites of both the
42 Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health, and shall
43 be regularly maintained, updated, and expanded by the task force, at
44 least once every 180 days thereafter, as necessary to ensure that it
45 continues to contain the most up-to-date service information.
46 Following the online publication of the list, the Department of
47 Agriculture and the Department of Health shall issue periodic

1 public service announcements, each year, to alert the public of the
2 availability of the list.

3
4 4. No later than three years after the task force's initial
5 organizational meeting, and on at least a triennial basis thereafter,
6 the task force shall issue a report to the Governor and, pursuant to
7 section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), to the Legislature,
8 summarizing the work undertaken by the task force during the
9 reporting period, describing the impact the task force has had on the
10 mental, psychological, and financial well-being of farmers and
11 other persons who own, operate, or work on farms in the State,
12 providing recommendations regarding the need for continued task
13 force operations, and providing recommendations for executive,
14 legislative, and other actions that the task force deems beneficial to,
15 or appropriate to support, the mental and psychological well-being
16 of farmers and other persons who own, operate, or work on farms in
17 the State.

18
19 5. This act shall take effect immediately.

20

21

22

STATEMENT

23

24 The bill establishes a task force to be known as the "Farm Mental
25 Health and Financial Services Task Force." The purpose of the task
26 force would be to develop and maintain a list of mental health and
27 financial assistance services for farm owners and operators, farm
28 supervisors, and farm laborers to bolster the mental and
29 psychological well-being of farmers and persons who own, operate,
30 or work on farms and provide financial services to enable these
31 persons to navigate the business and financial challenges of farm
32 life that may contribute to stress and deteriorating mental and
33 psychological well-being.

34 The 5-member task force would consist of the Secretary of
35 Agriculture, the Commissioner of Health, and three public
36 members, appointed by the Governor, including: 1) a representative
37 of a farmer advocacy group; 2) a representative of a Statewide
38 banking association active in agricultural communities, who has
39 experience in providing financial services, or has a firm
40 understanding of the financial services available, to farmers and
41 other persons working on farms; and 3) a representative of a
42 Statewide mental health advocacy group, who is familiar with the
43 mental health providers and services that are available to provide
44 counseling and other mental health assistance to farmers and other
45 persons working on farms in the State.

46 The task force would be required to develop and publicize a list
47 of mental health and financial assistance services that are available
48 to farm owners and operators, farm supervisors, and farm laborers

1 in the State, and provide associated information on the types and
2 nature of available services and the manner in which such services
3 may be accessed. The task force would be required to post the list
4 of available services on the Department of Agriculture and the
5 Department of Health websites, and thereafter, maintain and update
6 the list every 180 days to ensure that it contains the most up-to-date
7 information. After the online publication of the list the Department
8 of Agriculture and the Department of Health would be required to
9 broadcast periodic public service announcements, each year, to alert
10 the public to the availability of the list.

11 The task force would be required to issue a report, to the
12 Governor and the Legislature, no later than three years after the task
13 force's initial organizational meeting, and at least every three years
14 thereafter, summarizing the work undertaken by the task force
15 during the reporting period, describing the impact the task force has
16 had on the mental, psychological, and financial well-being of
17 farmers and persons who own, operate, or work on farms, providing
18 recommendations for the continuation of task force operations in
19 future years, and providing recommendations for executive,
20 legislative, and other actions that are deemed by the task force to be
21 beneficial to, or appropriate to support, the mental and
22 psychological well-being of farmers and persons who own, operate,
23 or work on farms in the State.

24 The rate of suicide among farmers is three and a half times
25 higher than among the general population, according to the National
26 Rural Health Association. Suicide rates in rural communities
27 increased by 48 percent between the years 2000 and 2018,
28 compared with 34 percent in urban areas.