AN ACT Relating to agricultural community mental health hotline services; adding a new section to chapter 71.24 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) The legislature finds that:

(a) The agricultural industry is an integral part of Washington's economy and sense of common identity, and that the behavioral health of workers in the industry and their family members is a statewide concern;

(b) Several factors related to the agricultural industry may affect the behavioral health of workers in the agricultural industry, including job-related isolation and demands, stressful work environments, the heightened potential for financial losses, lack of access to behavioral health services, and barriers or unwillingness to seek mental health services; and

(c) There has been an increased strain on agricultural workers' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ever-changing restrictions, market forces, and loss of life from the pandemic all increase the burden on these Washingtonians contributing to a possible increase in suicide rate.
(2) The legislature finds that there is an urgent need to provide resources specifically targeted to help workers in the agricultural industry and their family members manage their behavioral health needs.

NEW SECTION.  Sec. 2.  A new section is added to chapter 71.24 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Beginning January 1, 2022, each behavioral health administrative services organization shall contract with each cooperative extension established by a county under RCW 36.50.010 within the boundaries of the behavioral health administrative services organization for the provision of agricultural community mental health hotline services. The contracts must be sufficient to fund the hotline's operational costs, including the costs of staffing each hotline, training hotline staff, and developing resources for assisting callers.

(2) Each agricultural community mental health hotline shall provide a phone number for persons in the agricultural community to call when experiencing mental health stresses, including suicidal thoughts. Calls to the hotline must be anonymous and there may not be any tracing of callers by phone number or location. The hotline shall have staff available 24 hours per day, seven days per week to respond to calls. Hotline staff must have experience in the agricultural industry and be able to provide counseling interventions for persons in the agricultural industry experiencing mental health stresses.

(3) Washington State University shall develop training for hotline staff specific to counseling persons in agricultural communities who are experiencing mental health stresses, mental health resources for persons calling the hotline, and promotional materials as strategies for each cooperative extension to promote the hotline.

(4) The authority shall establish uniform data reporting requirements that behavioral health administrative services organizations must follow to collect data from each agricultural community mental health hotline. The data must relate to information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of each agricultural community mental health hotline and ways to improve access to mental health services for persons in the agricultural community. By November 1, 2023, the authority, in consultation with Washington State University, shall provide a report to the governor and the
relevant committees of the legislature with the status of the implementation of the agricultural community mental health hotlines and the types and number of calls received, as well as administrative and legislative options for improving their effectiveness.