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The Department of the Interior has recommended changing the law under which adult Indians are being provided with vocational training at Federal expense to establish three priorities of eligibility among the Indian candidates, Assistant Secretary Roger Ernst announced today.

First priority would be given to Indians residing on trust or restricted lands r Federal lands under jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior.

Second priority would go to Indians who within the preceding three years have moved to urban communities from residences on or near Indian reservations under the Relocation Services Program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Third priority would be given to Indians residing on or near reservations but not on trust, restricted, or Federal land.

The Department's proposal for amending the 1956 Indian adult vocational training law is embodied in its report to Congress on S. 1565. In its present form the bill would require that the program be made available to Indians who live on or near an Indian reservation without regard to residence on trust property. The effect, Mr. Ernst pointed out, would be to nullify a Department regulation which now makes the program available "primarily" to Indians in the top priority category proposed. He recommended that the bill be enacted only if amended as proposed.

"We believe," Mr. Ernst wrote, "that there is general agreement that the Department's first responsibility is to provide special Federal services to Indians who reside on trust or restricted land. For many years appropriations have been justified and made on that basis. Both the Department and the Congress have consistently taken the position that the Federal Government1s responsibility for providing special services to Indians stems from the original concentration of the Indian population in reservation areas on tax exempt land. Indians who leave the reservation areas to settle in towns and cities throughout the country become parts of communities in which they settle and cease to be a special Federal responsibility. They take their places as citizens of the State where they live, entitled to participate in the normal State and Federal programs.

"It is also generally agreed that the Indian trust property will support only a fraction of the Indians who are now living there. The United States has a responsibility to help solve the excess population problem. The Vocational Training Program is a very effective tool for relieving the population pressure on the inadequate land base. From the standpoint of the most effective use of Federal appropriations, this group should have first priority.

"Second priority as long as funds are limited should go to Indians who have voluntarily relocated themselves in areas removed from the reservations under the Bureau's relocation services program. Experience has shown that some of these Indians lack employment skills that are needed for a successful adaption to employment conditions, and that timely vocational training assistance may prevent some o£ them from giving up and returning to the reservations...

“Third priority should go to the Indians who live on or near reservations, but not on trust land. Inasmuch as they are living on taxable land, and are a part of the States and county system to a greater degree than are the Indians who are living on trust land, they should have a lesser priority than the Indians in the other two categories."

Mr. Ernst also noted that S. 1565 would eliminate language in the 1956 law which now limits annual appropriations for the Indian Adult Vocational Training program to $3,500,000. This, he said, would be “a desirable change" and would make the amount of the annual appropriation subject to the normal budgetary process.

At the end of June there were 901 Indian men and women, principally between 18 and 35, receiving vocational training under auspices of the Indian Bureau program in more than 50 schools in 16 States. In addition, the Bureau had on hand over 700 applications for vocational training, or considerably more than it can handle with funds available for the program in the present fiscal year.