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WAVLI – OTP – AVLIC– You: How does it all connect?

The idea of licensing (or title protection) for the interpreting profession is not a new one. It has been on and off AVLIC Board meeting agendas more than a few times over the years. It has come up at more than one AVLIC conference AGM and it eluded provincial chapters until July of 2011. At that time, WAVLI was granted Occupational Title Protection (OTP) by the BC Provincial Government.

Since then, our focus has been defining what OTP means for WAVLI members and the BC public. More recently, however, provincial conversations have turned to the national implications of this achievement. Events at the last AVLIC AGM, and many insightful discussions since, have highlighted the importance of clarifying what OTP in BC means for the rest of Canada.

As a starting point, it is important to understand that OTP is in place in BC to protect the public that we work with from fraudulent activity. OTP sets the standard for the public to be in receipt of service by someone who has been trained, linguistically and ethically. If there is someone practicing in the province, and calling themselves by one of the protected titles, but they do NOT hold a membership to WAVLI/AVLIC, then the public does not have the same assurance of training and recourse in case of malpractice.

OTP grants WAVLI members protected titles/initials – a tangible – that members can promote, so the public can distinguish the real McCoy from the proclaimed McCoy. Protected titles/initials are in essence, owned by the members. As owners we can use protected titles to promote a specialized skill set. As owners, through WAVLI Membership status, protected titles/initials provide consumers assurance of a level of qualification.

It is equally important though, to understanding what OTP does not do. OTP does not give WAVLI the authority to stop persons, who are not members of WAVLI, from providing interpreting services. OTP does not give WAVLI the authority to stop businesses/consumers from hiring persons, who are not members of WAVLI, into positions that require interpreting services. However, OTP does give WAVLI the authority to use protected titles/initials and educate consumers of interpreting service, so they know what to ask for to ensure they are receiving the services of a qualified service provider. OTP also give WAVLI the authority to legally challenge an unauthorized use of any one of the three protected titles.

Registered Sign Language Interpreter, Registered Visual Language Interpreter, and Registered ASL-English Interpreter are only protected in the province of BC. The word “registered” in the three titles, often affiliated with licensing, does not carry any particular meaning outside of the literal – registered, or signed-up, with WAVLI. Any connotations that may come with licensing in this case would not apply.

As AVLIC members of Affiliate Chapters in other provinces you can still use these

titles without repercussion. If you live and work in BC however, active membership through an Affiliate Chapter, other than WAVLI, does not give you the right to use the protected titles. If you live in another province, and hold a WAVLI membership, OTP will still only be recognized within the province of BC.

OTP does not mean that WAVLI's Affiliate Chapter status has changed. However, the way we conduct business has. An example of this would be the process for handling complaints. Despite the fact that AVLIC has a process in place, in order to maintain title protection WAVLI was required to develop a more stringent process. Though both processes are similar in spirit, there is a bit more required of the provincial process; record keeping being the most obvious distinction. This means that OTP requires complaints regarding WAVLI members, with respect to work in BC, be handled at the provincial level. In practice, consumers who access the AVLIC Dispute Resolution Process with a concern about a WAVLI member will be redirected to the provincial process.

The last few AVLIC AGMs have been particularly challenging for WAVLI, mostly because we are still coming to terms with how OTP status affects our day-to-day business. What we do know is we were granted OTP because we have established membership criteria that includes specialized training, because we have an established code of ethics and guidelines for professional conduct, and because our bylaws included the necessary pieces to qualify for OTP. A certification process and a dispute resolution process were also significant in supporting our readiness for such recognition. While there is room for variation between AVLIC and its Affiliate Chapters, changes at the national level, particularly when it concerns bylaws or membership categories, can have significant implications for the province of BC and OTP.

As mentioned earlier the idea of licensing or title protection is not a new one for AVLIC. WAVLI wasn't, and isn't, the only Affiliate Chapter working to achieve such recognition. WAVLI was simply the first. The variations in provincial legislation will also change what that recognition looks like from province to province. While OTP is the reality in BC or Alberta, licensing may be the reality in Ontario. As each provincial Affiliate Chapter attains their particular recognition, the implications for business at the national level will become more apparent.

As we head into the AVLIC 2014 conference AGM, our attention will be focused on motions for changes that could have implications for OTP. In doing so, it is not the intention of WAVLI to be difficult, rather thorough. OTP may be in place in BC but it does have ramifications for AVLIC and you. OTP is the precedent that recognizes the specialized training of a unique group of professionals, that can be used to promote the professional status of the interpreting profession in your province and the nation.