

September 18, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- When people hear the phrase "Romeo and Juliet," the first thing that often comes to mind is the Shakespearean tale of two star-crossed lovers kept apart by family and circumstance. However, many may be surprised to discover that the title of this particular play also has a separate and distinct meaning within the context of the law.

Specifically, Romeo and Juliet laws are statutes that create close-in-age exemptions to various sex crime penalties. For instance, if a particular state did not have any form of a Romeo and Juliet law, and instead only had a strictly enforced age of consent of 16-years-old, anyone having consensual sex with someone under the age of 16 could be found guilty of a sex crime - regardless of whether the accused was 17 or 40-years-old.

Consequently, Romeo and Juliet laws were enacted to establish distinctions between these two circumstances as many believed it fundamentally unfair to treat consensual sex between two teenagers the same as sex between a teen and someone middle-aged. In fact, lawmakers in New Jersey created their own close-in-age exemption for [New Jersey sex crimes](#) many years ago.

New Jersey's Romeo and Juliet law

Essentially, there are two major types of Romeo and Juliet laws. For example, in some states Romeo and Juliet laws protect those accused of sex crimes from conviction for consensual sex acts if they fall under the close-in-age exemption. Alternatively, other states protect those accused from having to register as sex offenders if they are ultimately convicted of purported sex crimes.

New Jersey's own [Romeo and Juliet law](#) falls under the first category. In particular, New Jersey's law states that an accused is guilty of sexual assault if sexual intercourse occurs with an alleged victim who is at least 13-years-old, but younger than 16-years-old, and the accused is "at least four years older" than the alleged victim. For example, if a 17-year-old has consensual sex with a 15-year-old in New Jersey, the 17-year-old will not be in violation of the statute since the two are close in age. However, if the age of the older individual is actually 23-years-old, this individual will be in violation of the statute for consensual sex with a 15-year-old.

As this article illustrates, Romeo and Juliet laws - as with most sex crime laws - are heavily

What New Jersey teens and parents need to know about Romeo Juliet laws

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dependent on the facts specific to the situation. Accordingly, if you have been charged with a sex crime, it is often best to seek the counsel of an experienced sex crime defense attorney who is familiar with these laws. A knowledgeable attorney can assist in reviewing the facts of your case and help ensure your rights are protected.

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