

October 12, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- When you think of the meaning of the term "sex offender," depending on your experience and beliefs, it can have meaning meanings. For many, it can mean having to register as a sex offender for the rest of one's life and carrying a certain social stigma. In addition, when many people think of the term, they think those who have committed sex crimes against adults or who had sexual contact with a minor.

Although "sex offender" can conjure up many meanings, it does not typically mean consensual sexual relations between teenagers for most people. However, in the eyes of the law, this was not always the case. In many states, including Texas, it used to be that once one of the teenage parties reached the age of 17, he or she could be charged with a sex offense if he or she had consensual relations with someone as old as 16.

Under the sex offender laws existing at that time, there were few exemptions to the registration requirements. As a result, the older of two teens, who were only one year apart in age (or high school grade), could potentially be charged with [sexual assault](#) and have to register as a sex offender.

Changes under Romeo and Juliet law

As the prior law often led to unjust consequences, in 2011, the Texas Legislature enacted a "Romeo and Juliet" law. This type of law, also enacted in many other states, works by exempting some teenagers (and young adults) who engage in consensual sexual activity with someone under the age of consent from being classified as a sex offender (and having to register as such).

Under Texas' version of the Romeo and Juliet law, if a young adult 17 years old or older has consensual sexual contact with someone who is at least 14 years old but no more than three years younger than the older party, the law exempts the older party from having to register as a sex offender.

A limitation of the Romeo and Juliet law is that it currently only applies to heterosexual relationships. As a result, those 17 or older that have consensual homosexual relations with a person no more than three years younger do not have the same protection against sex offender registration as heterosexuals have. To change this distinction, legislation has been introduced in the Texas Legislature that would extend the same Romeo and Juliet protections to homosexual relations.

An overview of Texas' Romeo and Juliet law

Written by Australian Business

An attorney can help

It is important to note that Texas' Romeo and Juliet law does not protect the older party from being charged for a [juvenile sex crime](#) (e.g. statutory rape). Instead, the law merely protects eligible parties that are convicted of a sex crime from having to register as a sex offender.

If you are a young adult and have been charged with a sex crime, you can face a serious charge that can carry significant jail time. An experienced criminal defense attorney can ensure that your rights are protected.

Article provided by The Law Offices of Tad Nelson & Associates Visit us at www.houston-criminalattorney.com