SYNOPSIS
Prohibits "gay panic" defense for murder; prevents reduction of murder charge to manslaughter committed in heat of passion under certain circumstances.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As introduced.
AN ACT concerning homicide committed in the heat of passion and amending N.J.S.2C:11-4.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. N.J.S.2C:11-4 is amended to read as follows:
   2C:11-4. Manslaughter. a. Criminal homicide constitutes aggravated manslaughter when:
   (1) The actor recklessly causes death under circumstances manifesting extreme indifference to human life; or
   (2) The actor causes the death of another person while fleeing or attempting to elude a law enforcement officer in violation of subsection b. of N.J.S.2C:29-2. Notwithstanding the provision of any other law to the contrary, the actor shall be strictly liable for a violation of this paragraph upon proof of a violation of subsection b. of N.J.S.2C:29-2 which resulted in the death of another person. As used in this paragraph, “actor” shall not include a passenger in a motor vehicle.
   b. Criminal homicide constitutes manslaughter when:
      (1) It is committed recklessly; or
      (2) A homicide which would otherwise be murder under [section] N.J.S.2C:11-3 is committed in the heat of passion resulting from a reasonable provocation.

For purposes of determining the heat of passion under this paragraph, a provocation is not objectively reasonable if it is based on the discovery of, knowledge about, or potential disclosure of the homicide victim’s actual or perceived gender identity or expression, or affectional or sexual orientation, including under circumstances in which the victim made an unwanted, non-forcible romantic or sexual advance toward the actor, or if the victim and actor dated or had a romantic or sexual relationship. As used herein, the term “gender identity or expression” shall have the same meaning as in subsection rr. of section 5 of P.L.1945, c.169 (C.10:5-5), and “affectional or sexual orientation” shall have the same meaning as in subsection hh. of that section.

c. Aggravated manslaughter under paragraph (1) of subsection a. of this section is a crime of the first degree and upon conviction thereof a person may, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1) of subsection a. of N.J.S.2C:43-6, be sentenced to an ordinary term of imprisonment between 10 and 30 years. Aggravated manslaughter under paragraph (2) of subsection a. of this section is a crime of the first degree. Manslaughter is a crime of the second degree.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.412, s.1)

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.
STATEMENT

This bill would prohibit the use of a so-called “gay panic” defense for the commission of murder. The bill is intended to prevent a defendant from seeking the reduction of a murder charge to a charge of manslaughter committed in the heat of passion, allegedly provoked by the discovery of, knowledge about, or potential disclosure of the homicide victim’s actual or perceived gender identity or expression, or affectional or sexual orientation. Under current law, a homicide which would otherwise be murder is reduced to manslaughter if the jury finds that the homicide was committed “in the heat of passion resulting from a reasonable provocation.” N.J.S.2C:4, subsection b., paragraph (2).

A provoked, heat of passion manslaughter is graded as a crime of the second degree, ordinarily punishable by five to 10 years imprisonment, a fine of up to $150,000, or both, while murder is a crime of the first degree, punishable by a term of imprisonment for a period ranging from 30 years to life, depending upon the circumstances of the act (see N.J.S.2C:11-3), a fine of up to $200,000, or both.

The bill’s provisions would most notably prevent the use of the “gay panic” defense to seek a reduction to manslaughter under circumstances in which the homicide victim made an unwanted, non-forcible romantic or sexual advance toward the actor, or if the victim and actor dated or had a romantic or sexual relationship.