

# Elijah McClain's legacy



Elijah McClain was walking home from a convenience store on Aug. 24, 2019, when he was restrained, choked and given a sedative. He died six days later.

*Courtesy of the McClain family*

Two years later, his mother is working to make sure his death helps bring positive change

By Noelle Phillips  
*The Denver Post*

The mom wears her son's picture on homemade shirts.

Everyone has seen the photograph — the clean-cut young Black man with his plaid shirt buttoned to the top. His dark-framed glasses. Lips slightly curved into a soft smile.

The image of Elijah McClain was splashed across television screens and websites in 2020 at the height of protests against police brutality in Denver and across the nation. His name was printed on T-shirts, buttons, posters, murals and sports uniforms.

But this is Sheneen McClain's son. The young man she raised as they bounced between homes, scraping together a life through public benefits, charity and whatever jobs she could find.

And she will control his legacy.

"His legacy has to be about what's right in this world, but, unfortunately, his death is highlighted by what is wrong in the world," Sheneen McClain said during one of three interviews with *The Denver Post* in anticipation of the anniversary of her son's death. "Elijah's legacy is about how humanity matters, how our lives matter."

Tuesday will mark two years since Elijah McClain's fatal encounter with Aurora police officers.

His death outraged millions of Americans and helped lead to major police reform in Colorado.

It also sparked investigations into the Aurora Police Department's use-of-force policies and its training and hiring practices, and a federal lawsuit filed by Sheneen that blames police for her

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Sheneen McClain, wearing a homemade shirt, stands at the site where Elijah was confronted by Aurora police officers. She was offended that others would sell products that profited on her son's death and is determined to shape how he is remembered. "Elijah's legacy is about how humanity matters, how our lives matter."

*AAron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post*



