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# Elijah McClain's mother says Biden's police-reform order doesn't do enough, urges Congress to go further

Sheneen McClain was invited to the White House to witness the signing of the executive order



Courtesy of Qusair Mohamedbhai

Sheneen McClain, whose son Elijah McClain was killed in a violent encounter with Aurora police in Aug. 2019, meets Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House on Wednesday. McClain and her lawyer, Qusair Mohamedbhai, were invited to witness President Joe Biden sign an executive order that created nationwide police reforms.



By **NOELLE PHILLIPS** | [nphillips@denverpost.com](mailto:nphillips@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: May 25, 2022 at 1:16 p.m. | UPDATED: May 25, 2022 at 5:47 p.m.

Sheneen McClain strolled the White House grounds Wednesday morning, reflecting on her son Elijah's death during a violent police encounter and contemplating what she would say to President Joe Biden later in the afternoon when she attended the ceremonial signing of an executive order intended to create national police reform standards.

"It doesn't do enough," Sheneen McClain said of the executive order. "The killing hasn't stopped. There are police officers still free after murdering somebody because the law allows it."

McClain was [invited to the White House](#) on Monday without knowing much about why the invitation had been extended and then took just the second plane ride of her life to get there.

She and her lawyer, Qusair Mohamedbhai, toured the White House and met other invited guests Wednesday morning before waiting to attend the afternoon ceremony. They expected to meet privately with the president, and McClain said she was still gathering her thoughts about what she would say to Biden.

The president's executive order includes provisions that will:

- Create a national database for reporting police misconduct
- Require all federal law enforcement to wear body cameras
- Ban chokeholds and carotid restraints unless deadly force is necessary
- Ban no-knock warrants
- Restrict the flow of military surplus to local police and sheriffs
- Require all law enforcement to revise use-of-force policies and to create de-escalation standards
- Prioritize officer wellness, according to an overview released Wednesday by the White House.

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris spoke before the signing, acknowledging that Black people die at the hands of police far more often than people of other races and ethnicities. They said they hoped the reforms would help restore trust in police.



"I don't know any good cop who likes a bad cop," Biden said. "But to many people, including families who are here, accountability does not happen often enough."



Jim Watson, AFP via Getty Images

President Joe Biden participates in a signing ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington D.C. on May 25, 2022. Biden signed an Executive Order which created some national policing reform standards.

The signing took place on the second anniversary of George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer, and the audience included Floyd's daughter, Gianna Floyd, and at least one of his brothers. Tamika Palmer, the mother of Breonna Taylor, who was killed in 2020 by Louisville, Kentucky, police while asleep in her home, also attended.

Biden pledged to implement police reforms when he campaigned for president. Meanwhile, Congress has failed to move a police reform bill named after Floyd, and Biden is limited in what he can do singlehandedly. During the signing ceremony, Biden and Harris called on the U.S. Senate to approve the bill.

"He's doing a really difficult balancing act," Mohamedbhai said of the president. "He's balancing lives against politics and power. That's a distasteful balancing act."

On Wednesday, McClain rebuked Congress for failing to move ahead to limit police powers and punish those who kill citizens without justification.

"That's sad because those people are elected and put in those positions, but they don't represent the people they serve," she said.



Elijah McClain was killed in August 2019 after Aurora Police Department officers stopped him while he was walking home from a convenience store. The 23-year-old massage therapist who played the violin questioned the officers as to why they were stopping him, and the officers almost immediately took him to the ground.

There, they placed McClain in a carotid control hold as he begged them to stop, telling officers he couldn't breathe and that he was not the kind of person to cause trouble. Paramedics injected McClain with ketamine, a heavy sedative. He blacked out and went into cardiac arrest on the way to a hospital, where he died a few days later.

His last words, "My name's Elijah McClain," became a rallying cry during the 2020 police protests. While those nationwide demonstrations started in the wake of Floyd's death, McClain quickly became a face of the movement.

On Wednesday, Sheneen McClain met Floyd's brother at the White House and said it was inspiring.

"There's a lot of people who have been hurt by police brutality, and it's very significant to meet them," she said.

McClain, who is a private person, has been [a fierce defender of her son's name and image](#). She frequently declines invitations to attend events in Elijah's honor and refuses to allow politicians to use his name on legislation if she does not approve of every measure in a bill.

She doesn't hold back her words when describing what happened to her son and demands that no other people be killed by police officers sworn to protect their communities.

During the 2020 Colorado General Assembly, she frequently appeared at the statehouse to lobby for police reform bills. Many of them were passed by the Democratic-controlled legislature and are seen nationally as an example for other states to follow even as Republicans blame rising crime rates on the reforms.





Aaron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post

Sheneen McClain stands at the site where her son Elijah had a violent interaction with Aurora Police officers and paramedics which resulted in the 23-year-old being fatally restrained, choked and given a sedative on Aug. 24, 2019.

Other victims of law enforcement violence who McClain is meeting have praised Colorado's police reform, Mohamedbhai said.

"It's interesting to hear what people think of Elijah and Colorado," Mohamedbhai said. "We are seen as a symbol. What we got in Colorado is even more than the executive order."

McClain often wears homemade T-shirts with her son's picture and name on them and with slogans such as "Racists are hateful by design" and "Black Lives Matter."

She said Wednesday in an interview with The Denver Post that she considered wearing a shirt with the message "The divided states of America has blood on their hands. Do better" printed on it, but instead opted for a more subdued blouse and dress pants.

"I'm still honored to be here, but it would be nicer if it were under different circumstances," McClain said.



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