



**Sheneen McClain, right, mother of Elijah McClain, and friend and supporter MiDian Holmes raise their fists in protest after suspended Aurora, Colo., police officer Nathan Woodyard was acquitted Monday.**  
PHOTOS BY HART VAN DENBURG/COLORADO PUBLIC RADIO VIA AP

# 2nd Colorado officer acquitted in the death of Elijah McClain

23-year-old was put in a neck hold, given ketamine

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRIGHTON, Colo. — A second Denver-area police officer was acquitted Monday in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain, who was put in a neck hold and injected with ketamine after being stopped by police as he walked home from a convenience store.

The jury found Aurora officer Nathan Woodyard not guilty of homicide and manslaughter following a weekslong trial in state district court. He faced years in prison if convicted.

McClain's mother, Sheneen McClain, who was in the courtroom, wiped tears from her eyes after the verdict was read.

Defense lawyer Megan Downing said, "We believe it was the right verdict, not an easy one."

The case received little attention until protests over the 2020 killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked renewed outrage over McClain's death. The 23-year-old Black man's pleading words captured on police body camera video, "I'm an introvert and I'm different," struck a chord.

An earlier trial against two other officers resulted in split verdict, with one convicted of homicide and third degree assault and the other officer acquitted.

McClain died after being put in a neck hold by Woodyard, then pinned to the ground by Woodyard and several other officers before he was injected by paramedics with an overdose of ketamine.

Defense attorneys stressed Woodyard was not there during crucial minutes when McClain's condition was deteriorating. Body camera footage seen by jurors showed Woodyard stepping away for part of the confrontation.

Two paramedics are awaiting trial



**Suspended Aurora, Colo., police officer Nathan Woodyard, front, leaves the courtroom at the Adams County Justice Center on Monday after he was acquitted in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain.**

later this month.

A local prosecutor in 2019 decided against criminal charges because the coroner's office could not determine exactly how the massage therapist died. But Colorado Gov. Jared Polis ordered state Attorney General Phil Weiser's office to take another look at the case in 2020 and a grand jury indicted the officers and paramedics in 2021.

The killings of McClain, Floyd and others triggered a wave of legislation that put limits on the use of neck holds in more than two dozen states. Colorado now tells paramedics not to give ketamine to people suspected of having a controversial condition known as excited delirium, which has symptoms including increased strength and has been associated with racial bias against Black men.

Unlike the first two officers who were prosecuted, Woodyard took the stand during his trial. He testified that he put McClain in the carotid control hold be-

cause he feared for his life after he heard McClain say, "I intend to take my power back" and another officer say, "He just grabbed your gun, dude."

McClain was stopped Aug. 24, 2019, while walking home from a convenience store on a summer night, listening to music and wearing a mask that covered most of his face. The police stop quickly became physical after McClain, seemingly caught off guard, asked to be left alone. He had not been accused of committing any crime.

Woodyard and other officers told investigators they took McClain down after hearing Officer Randy Roedema say, "He grabbed your gun, dude." Roedema later said Officer Jason Rosenblatt's gun was the target.

Paramedics injected McClain with ketamine as Roedema and another officer who was not charged held him on the ground. He went into cardiac arrest en route to the hospital and died three days later.