

Teen shot in back by Louisiana police, charged with resisting arrest

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The Jefferson Parish District Attorney's office intends to move forward with resisting arrest charges against a 14-year-old African American teen who was shot in the back by a sheriff's deputy in Westwego, Louisiana while laying prone on the ground during his arrest on March 20.

District Attorney Paul Connick Jr. filed charges against Tre'mall McGee this week even as his family continues to demand answers as to why he was shot more than three months after the fact.

According to his family, McGee was riding with his friends in a car, which he did not know was stolen. Jefferson Parish Sheriff's deputies began trailing the vehicle and pulled it over at the intersection of Westbank Expressway and Central Avenue. The driver pulled over and ran off along with the other riders in the vehicle.

McGee was stopped and complied with orders to lay down and place his hands behind his back. It was then he felt a shot, and his body went numb. The police officer's bullet had entered his back and exited his arm.

The young teen was treated at a local hospital and released to a juvenile detention center, but there was no explanation for why he was shot. The fact that the unarmed McGee was shot in the back while lying on his stomach was only recently made public. Yet as of this week the DA is still determined to move forward with resisting arrest charges against the teenager.

McGee's mother has been demanding answers from the sheriff's office for three months to no avail, while the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office has spent months concealing that there was a shooting at all.

Grateful her son is still alive, Tiffany McGee is demanding the sheriff's office hold officers accountable for shooting her son as he was complying

with orders. "You're trying to figure out a way of justifying the fact that you shot a minor, in the back," she spoke of the sheriff's office to *WWL*.

Joe Lopinto, the head sheriff of Jefferson Parish, claimed in a recent press conference that the details of the incident were initially concealed due to Tre'mall McGee's age. He said, "I know people are looking for answers. They're always looking for answers, but we have a process that is in place."

Attorney Ron Haley is representing the McGee family in the civil case against the sheriff's office, as well as defending Tre'mall pro bono against the resisting arrest charges. "He's a kid, a kid that posed no threat to law enforcement," Haley told *WWL*. "We want the officers that were participating in this, the officer that shot him to be held accountable."

Sheriff Lopinto for his part defended his deputies while refusing to give details as to what happened during the arrest that might have justified shooting a boy lying face down on the ground. Lopinto has also called the shooting "nonlife threatening," as if that justified the action and his office's refusal to discuss it publicly.

"The sheriff's flippant response—and I hope it's not the case, truly—but his flippant response is giving the impression that if a deputy shoots a child in Jefferson Parish that it can go unreported and undetected and more importantly not investigated just because the victim is a child," Haley responded. "That is utterly ridiculous. How many children need to get shot before someone steps up and says we need to look into what's going on with the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office?"

Tre'mall's mother says she is exhausted after months of what she called "amateur sleuthing" in order to get a response from the sheriff's office even admitting that an officer had shot her son, "I want them to take

responsibility on what they did, look me in my eyes and just give me a good reason on why. You were that scared, you were that much of a coward, of someone laying on the ground unarmed?” McGee told *WWL* .

In Louisiana most sheriff’s offices are required to involve Louisiana State Police in investigating any officer-involved shooting. However, the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office, a police force notorious for its brutality and overtly racist officers, investigates shootings internally.

Since the state police needs to be requested in order to investigate a shooting, there is no open case on the matter, and the JPSO has declined to comment on whether it is being investigated at all. “The idea that his own mother—after months of calls and getting the runaround from professional law enforcement—finally got the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office to admit that it was someone from their department that shot her son is absurd and pathetic,” Haley explained to *WWL*. “At this point we don’t have a damn clue if anyone is investigating Tre’mall McGee’s shooting. And that should put the fear of God into anyone who cares about justice and fairness in policing.”



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