

**THE CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY
OFFICE OF
THE MUNICIPAL COUNSELOR**

Council Agenda
Item No. IX. AY
3/25/2025

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Kenneth Jordan
Municipal Counselor

Resolution authorizing the Municipal Counselor to waive service of process and to confess judgment without admission of liability in the amount of \$5,629.69 and all the costs of the action in the Oklahoma County District Court in the claim filed by Russell and Diane Burke Trust c/o Russell Burke. Ward 8.

Claimant's address:
17504 Iron Lane
Oklahoma City, OK 73012

This office acknowledges receipt of a claim from the above-referenced claimant, in which the claimant alleges that on February 7, 2025, claimant's vehicle, which was being driven by his son, was damaged when it was struck by a City vehicle driven by an Oklahoma City Fire Department employee at or near NW 10th Street and Portland Avenue in Oklahoma City. The claimant alleges damages in the amount of \$5,629.69, the cost of repairing the left front side of the vehicle, including a new wheel and tire. This amount is supported by documentation.

Section 153(A) of the Governmental Tort Claims Act provides:

A. The state or a political subdivision shall be liable for loss resulting from its torts or the torts of its employees acting within the scope of their employment subject to the limitations and exceptions specified in The Governmental Tort Claims Act and only where the state or political subdivision, if a private person or entity, would be liable for money damages under the laws of this state. The state or a political subdivision shall not be liable under the provisions of The Governmental Tort Claims Act for any act or omission of an employee acting outside the scope of the employee's employment.

51 O.S. 2023 Supp. §153(A).

According to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, a prima facie case of negligence is established by showing the following: "(1) a duty owed by the defendant to protect the plaintiff from injury, (2) a failure to properly exercise or perform that duty and (3) the plaintiff's injuries are proximately caused by the defendant's failure to exercise his duty of care." *McKellips v. Saint Francis Hospital, Inc.*, 741 P.2d 467, 470 (Okla. 1987) (citations omitted).

Proximate cause has two components - legal causation and cause in fact. *Id.* Cause in fact

is determined by the "but for" test: "The defendant's conduct is a cause of the event if the event would not have occurred but for that conduct." *Id.* (citations omitted). "Proximate cause" is also a synonym for "legal cause." BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY, 804 (6th Ed. 1990). To clarify this issue, the Oklahoma Supreme Court has further defined proximate cause: "The proximate cause of an event must be that which in a natural and continuous sequence, unbroken by an independent cause, produces the event and without which the event would not have occurred." *Gaines v. Providence Apartments*, 750 P.2d 125, 126-27 (Okla. 1987) (citations omitted).

The Supreme Court of Oklahoma has further stated that the driver of a motor vehicle must always use that degree of care which is reasonable and prudent under the circumstances. *Agee v. Gant*, 412 P.2d 155 (Okla. 1966).

This office is in receipt of information from the Oklahoma City Fire Department and the Official Oklahoma Traffic Collision Report regarding this incident. The Traffic Collision Report indicates no improper action by the claimant or the City employee driving the Fire Department ambulance, but does detail that the accident occurred when the driver of the City vehicle drifted into the lane of the vehicle being driven by claimant's son. This occurred when the City vehicle hit a bump causing the City vehicle to sway and ultimately cross into the lane of the claimant's vehicle.

Based on the above information and applicable Oklahoma law, it is the opinion of this office that this claim should be approved, and that the Municipal Counselor should be authorized to Confess Judgment without admission of liability in the amount of \$5,629.69 and all costs of the action in the District Court. If Council agrees, a Resolution to that effect has been prepared.

SRK