

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

Council Agenda
Item No. IX. CM
8/27/2024

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 \$6,000 and all the costs of the action in the Oklahoma County District Court in the claim filed by Dale Watwood. Ward 6.

Claimant's address:
5416 SE 4th Street
Del City, OK 73115

This office acknowledges receipt of a claim from the above-referenced claimant, in which the claimant alleges that, on June 21, 2024, claimant's vehicle was damaged in a collision with an Oklahoma City Public Works vehicle near the intersection of West Reno Avenue and South Villa Avenue. The claimant alleges damages in the amount of \$16,794.72, the cost to repair his vehicle. After negotiations, this office has agreed to recommend, and the claimant has agreed to accept, \$6,000 as full and final settlement of all aspects of this claim. This amount reflects the Kelly Blue Book value of claimant's vehicle.

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 this 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 this act for any act or omission of an employee acting outside the scope of his 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 Police Department regarding this incident, including the Official Oklahoma Traffic Collision Report. This information confirms that on June 21, 2024, the claimant was involved in a collision with a City Public Works Freightliner on westbound West Reno Avenue at South Villa Avenue. This information shows that the City driver began to change lanes from the inside lane into the outside lane when the City vehicle collided with the claimant's vehicle, already occupying the outside lane. The Traffic Collision Report indicates that the City driver changing lanes unsafely was a contributing factor to the collision. It shows no improper action taken by the claimant.

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 \$6,000 and all costs of the action in the District Court. If Council agrees, a Resolution to that effect has been prepared.

MKG