

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

Council Agenda
Item No. XI. Y
8/13/2024

Roberta Fox-Luton
2300 Shady Tree Lane
Edmond, OK 73013
Ward 6 (Location of Incident)
\$2,541.18
Recommended for DENIAL

AGENDA CLAIM # a

This office acknowledges receipt of a claim from the above-referenced claimant in which claimant alleges claimant's vehicle was damaged on October 4, 2023, when it struck a pothole while traveling at or near South Douglas Avenue and SW 54th Street in Oklahoma City. Damages are alleged in the amount of \$2,541.18, the cost of headlight replacement, bumper replacement, temporary patches, and A/C compressor repair. 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 held that "the municipality is not an insurer of safety of the traveling public." *Williams v. City of Bristow*, 350 P.2d 484 (Okla. 1960), *Rider v. City of Norman*, 476 P.2d 312, 313 (Okla. 1970), and *Evans v. City of Eufaula*, 527 P.2d 329, 332 (Okla. 1974). A municipality has a duty to exercise ordinary or reasonable care in maintaining the streets and sidewalks in a reasonably safe condition for those using them in a proper manner. *Rider v. City of Norman*, 476 P.2d 312, 313 (Okla. 1970) and *Evans v. City of Eufaula*, 527 at 332. A municipality is liable only for negligence in failing to repair, remove or guard against substantial defects or obstructions after actual or constructive notice of their existence. *Williams* at 488.

Regarding constructive notice, the Supreme Court of Oklahoma has held that a city need not have actual notice of the condition of its streets to be liable for injuries resulting from defective condition of its streets, but it is sufficient that the defective condition has existed for such a period of time that the city, by use of ordinary care, could have discovered it. *City of Norman v. Sallee*, 238 P.2d 292, 296 (Okla. 1951), *Picher v. Barrett*, 249 P.739, 740 (Okla. 1926), *Wagoner v. Black*, 97 P.2d 21, 23 (Okla. 1939) citing *Armstrong v. City of Tulsa*, 226 P. 560, 563 (Okla. 1924), and *Sapulpa v. Williams*, 249 P. 152 (Okla. 1926).

This office is in receipt of information from the Streets Maintenance Division of the Public Works Department regarding this incident. The information indicates that there were no reports of potholes near the same location in the six months prior to the incident. In this case, it appears the City did not have actual or constructive notice of the defective condition of the streets at or near this location prior to the claimant's incident.

Based on the above information and applicable Oklahoma law, it is the opinion of this office that this claim should be denied, and we so recommend.

JRS

DENIED

Ke'Andre Post
2801 South Harvey Avenue
Ward 6
\$729.99
Recommended for DENIAL

AGENDA CLAIM # b

This office acknowledges receipt of a claim from the above-referenced claimant in which claimant alleges damages on June 9, 2024, during his arrest. Claimant alleges that while being arrested by a member of the Oklahoma City Police Department, the officer removed items from his person and placed them on the roof of a car and did not retrieve the items before leaving the scene, resulting in the items being lost. Damages are alleged in the amount of \$729.99, the cost of replacing claimant's lost iPhone 13. 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 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. 2018 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 office is in receipt of information from the Oklahoma City Police Department regarding this incident. This information indicates that no phone was reported to have been removed from the claimant's possession during the arrest. Additionally, statements from the arresting officer and a subsequent review of bodycam footage both indicate that while an inhaler and car keys were left on the roof of the car, there was no phone placed on the roof of the car with these other items.

Based on the above information and applicable Oklahoma law, it is the opinion of this office that this claim should be denied, and we so recommend.

JRS