

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

Staci R. v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration

Staci R. · No. 6:24-cv-01849-SB · Decided March 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Oregon reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of disability benefits for the period before December 5, 2014. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge improperly assigned no weight to the testimony of the medical expert concerning the claimant’s mental limitations and need for unscheduled breaks. The court reversed the Commissioner’s decision and remanded for calculation and payment of benefits.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Stacie F. Beckerman
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
DECIDED	March 2, 2026
DOCKET	6:24-cv-01849-SB
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review of the Commissioner's partially favorable decision denying Disability Insurance Benefits and Supplemental Security Income for the period before December 5, 2014.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews Social Security determinations deferentially and may disturb the Commissioner's decision only when it is unsupported by substantial evidence or based on legal error. Legal error is harmless if inconsequential to the ultimate nondisability determination or if the agency's reasoning can reasonably be discerned. The court applies the credit-as-true standard when determining whether to remand for an award of benefits.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court opinion with no reported citation
PARTIES	Staci R. v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

reasonable accommodation

essential job functions

remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

federal judicial review

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons supported by substantial evidence for assigning no weight to the testifying medical expert's opinion.
2. Whether the ALJ's rejection of the medical expert's testimony was harmful error.
3. Whether the credit-as-true standard was satisfied such that remand for calculation and payment of benefits, rather than further administrative proceedings, was warranted.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ erred by assigning no weight to the medical expert's opinion based on the terminology he used and by treating the opinion as internally inconsistent. The expert's use of "marked" and "seriously limited" was consistent with the Social Security regulations, and a marked limitation allowing some contact with others was not inherently inconsistent with a marked, rather than extreme, social limitation.
2. The ALJ erred by assigning no weight to the medical expert's opinion that Plaintiff required reasonable accommodations in the form of unscheduled breaks when panic attacks occurred.
3. The ALJ's error was harmful because crediting the medical expert's opinion established that Plaintiff required additional unscheduled breaks that would preclude competitive full-time employment.
4. Remand for calculation and payment of benefits was appropriate because the record was fully developed, the ALJ failed to provide legally sufficient reasons for rejecting the medical expert's opinion, crediting that opinion as true required a finding of disability, and the record created no serious doubt that Plaintiff was disabled.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The Court finds that it was error to disregard a medical expert's opinion about Plaintiff's need for reasonable accommodations." (Discussion I.B)

"The Court concludes that the credit-as-true standard is satisfied here and remand for the payment of benefits is appropriate." (Discussion II.B)

"For the reasons stated, the Court REVERSES the Commissioner's decision and REMANDS for the calculation and payment of benefits." (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability from mental impairments including bipolar II disorder, ADHD, anxiety, depression, and migraines. The ALJ found severe ADHD, bipolar II disorder, and anxiety disorder, and determined that

Plaintiff was disabled beginning December 5, 2014, but not before that date. A testifying medical expert opined that Plaintiff had significant mental limitations and would require reasonable accommodations, including unscheduled fifteen- to twenty-minute breaks when panic symptoms occurred. The vocational expert testified that taking more than standard breaks would not be competitive employment, and the district court found that the record did not show a material change in Plaintiff's impairments on December 5, 2014.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for DIB and SSI in 2014. After an ALJ found her disabled beginning December 5, 2014 but not before that date, the Appeals Council made the decision final. In an earlier judicial-review proceeding, the court remanded with instructions to determine the onset date with assistance from a medical expert and to reassess testimony. On remand, the ALJ again found disability beginning December 5, 2014, but the district court concluded that the ALJ improperly rejected the testifying medical expert's opinion and remanded for calculation and payment of benefits.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand to the Commissioner of Social Security for calculation and payment of benefits.

CASES CITED

- Treichler v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 775 F.3d 1090, 1098 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Consolo v. Federal Maritime Commission, 383 U.S. 607, 621 (1966)
- Brown-Hunter v. Colvin, 806 F.3d 487, 492 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Smith v. Kijakazi, 14 F.4th 1108, 1111 (9th Cir. 2021)
- Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1111 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Farlow v. Kijakazi, 53 F.4th 485, 487 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Keyser v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 648 F.3d 721, 724-25 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Bustamante v. Massanari, 262 F.3d 949, 953-54 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1100 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Valentine v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 574 F.3d 685, 692 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Lester v. Chater, 81 F.3d 821, 830 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 956-57 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Ghanim v. Colvin, 763 F.3d 1154, 1161, 1164, 1166 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Ryan v. Commissioner of Social Security, 528 F.3d 1194, 1198 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1009, 1012-13, 1020-22 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Reddick v. Chater, 157 F.3d 715, 725 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Holohan v. Massanari, 246 F.3d 1195, 1205-08 (9th Cir. 2001)

- *Andrews v. Shalala*, 53 F.3d 1035, 1042 (9th Cir. 1995)
- *Woods v. Kijakazi*, 32 F.4th 785, 787-92 (9th Cir. 2022)
- *Stout v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration*, 454 F.3d 1050, 1054 (9th Cir. 2006)
- *Benecke v. Barnhart*, 379 F.3d 587, 595 (9th Cir. 2004)
- *Leitz v. Kijakazi*, No. 22-35356, 2023 WL 4342114, at *3 (9th Cir. July 5, 2023)
- *Hoffschneider v. Kijakazi*, No. 18-15504, 2022 WL 3229989, at *3 (9th Cir. Aug. 10, 2022)
- *Varela v. Saul*, 827 F. App'x 713, 714-15 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Smith v. Saul*, 820 F. App'x 582, 586 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Staci R. v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration*, No. 6:18-cv-01453-AA, 2022 WL 17485583, at *4, *11 (D. Or. Dec. 7, 2022)
- *John M. v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration*, No. 3:20-cv-02133-AR, 2023 WL 155550, at *6 (D. Or. Jan. 11, 2023)
- *French v. Kijakazi*, No. 21-cv-0092-BLM, 2022 WL 3362276, at *6 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 15, 2022)
- *Rick W. v. Berryhill*, No. 1:17-cv-01435-YY, 2019 WL 3046120, at *7-8 (D. Or. May 22, 2019)
- *Bronson v. Berryhill*, No. 316CV00319LRHWGC, 2017 WL 2972331, at *11 (D. Nev. July 12, 2017)