

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
NORTH CAROLINA, EASTERN DIVISION

Gary Lindsey v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security
Administration

Lindsey · No. No. 4:24-CV-149-KS · Decided March 16, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina reviewed the denial of Gary Lindsey’s application for disability insurance benefits. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge’s residual functional capacity assessment was supported by substantial evidence and that the administrative record was adequately developed. The court affirmed the Commissioner of Social Security’s decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kimberly A. Swank
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Eastern Division
DECIDED	March 16, 2026
DOCKET	No. 4:24-CV-149-KS
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner of Social Security's final decision denying disability insurance benefits. The parties consented to proceed before a United States magistrate judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's factual findings and whether the decision was reached through application of the correct legal standards. The court may not reweigh conflicting evidence, make credibility determinations, or substitute its judgment for the Commissioner's, but must determine whether all relevant evidence was considered and sufficiently explained.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court opinion with no reported citation identified in the source.
PARTIES	Gary Lindsey v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

agency adjudication

disability definition

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability benefits

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

disability benefits

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity assessment was supported by substantial evidence.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on a lay interpretation of spinal MRI and other medical data instead of medical opinion evidence.
3. Whether the ALJ failed to adequately develop the administrative record by not obtaining a medical opinion addressing Lindsey's functional limitations.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's residual functional capacity assessment was supported by substantial evidence and was reached through application of the correct legal standards.
2. The ALJ did not improperly rely on his own lay interpretation of the spinal MRI because he accurately relied on and characterized Dr. Wehning's interpretation of the MRI results.
3. The ALJ did not fail to adequately develop the record.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Substantial evidence is “such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion; [i]t consists of more than a mere scintilla of evidence but may be somewhat less than a preponderance.”” (Discussion, Standard of Review)

““In reviewing for substantial evidence, [the court should not] undertake to re-weigh conflicting evidence, make credibility determinations, or substitute [its] judgment for that of the [Commissioner].”” (Discussion, Standard of Review)

““the law does not require the RFC to mirror a medical opinion; rather, the ALJ must consider the record as a whole, including ‘medical facts (e.g., laboratory findings) and nonmedical evidence (e.g., daily activities, observations).’”” (Discussion, RFC analysis)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Lindsey applied for disability insurance benefits based on impairments including type II diabetes, coronary artery disease following myocardial infarctions and stent placement, hypertension, lumbar spine spondylitic changes, and chronic kidney disease. The ALJ found that Lindsey was not engaged in substantial gainful activity, had severe impairments that did not meet or equal a listed impairment, and retained the residual functional capacity for light work with specified limitations. The ALJ concluded that Lindsey could perform his past relevant work as an apartment house manager and was not disabled through December 31, 2023, his date last insured.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Lindsey applied for disability insurance benefits in October 2021, alleging disability beginning November 1, 2019. The application was denied initially and on reconsideration. After a February 8, 2024 telephonic hearing, the ALJ issued an unfavorable decision on March 7, 2024, and the Appeals Council denied review on August 29, 2024. Lindsey filed this action on October 17, 2024, and the district court affirmed the Commissioner's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- 829 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987)
- 76 F.3d 585, 589 (4th Cir. 1996)
- 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- 368 F.2d 640, 642 (4th Cir. 1966)
- 270 F.3d 171, 176 (4th Cir. 2001)
- 131 F.3d 438, 439–40 (4th Cir. 1997)
- 174 F.3d 473, 475 n.2 (4th Cir. 1999)
- 65 F.3d 1200, 1203 (4th Cir. 1995)
- 658 F.2d 260, 264–65 (4th Cir. 1981)
- 780 F.3d 632, 635 (4th Cir. 2015)
- 459 F. App'x 226, 230–31 (4th Cir. 2011)
- 2019 WL 118414, at *4 (E.D.N.C. Jan. 7, 2019)
- 444 F. Supp. 2d 457, 465 (E.D.N.C. 2005)
- 783 F.2d 1168, 1173 (4th Cir. 1986)
- 2017 WL 782562, at *4 (E.D.N.C. Jan. 24, 2017)
- 2017 WL 780795 (E.D.N.C. Feb. 28, 2017)
- 983 F.3d 83, 108–09 (4th Cir. 2020)