

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
NEW YORK

Lara Jeanette M. v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 5:24-CV-1365 (AMN/PJE) · No. No. 5:24-CV-1365 (AMN/PJE) · Decided February 25, 2026

SUMMARY

This Report-Recommendation and Order addresses Lara Jeanette M.'s challenge under 42 U.S.C. §§ 405(g) and 1383(c)(3) to the denial of her application for supplemental security income benefits. The magistrate judge recommends granting the Commissioner's cross-motion, denying the plaintiff's motion, and affirming the Commissioner's decision. The principal issue discussed is whether the administrative law judge properly evaluated the medical opinion of Dr. James Tarala and supported the residual functional capacity finding with substantial evidence.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Paul J. Evangelista
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
DECIDED	February 25, 2026
DOCKET	No. 5:24-CV-1365 (AMN/PJE)
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Report-recommendation and order on cross-motions for judgment on the pleadings in an action seeking review of the Commissioner's denial of Supplemental Security Income benefits.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court may not determine de novo whether an individual is disabled. The Commissioner's determination may be reversed only if the correct legal standards were not applied or the decision was not supported by substantial evidence. Substantial evidence is more than a mere scintilla and means such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. When the correct legal standards are applied and the ALJ's findings are supported by substantial evidence, the findings must be sustained even if substantial evidence could also support the claimant's position.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Lara Jeanette M. v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

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PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

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civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated Dr. Tarala's medical opinion under the supportability and consistency requirements of 20 C.F.R. § 416.920c.
2. Whether substantial evidence supported the ALJ's residual functional capacity finding and ultimate determination that plaintiff was not disabled.
3. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on a normal nerve conduction study in evaluating the severity and consistency of the limitations stated in Dr. Tarala's opinion.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ did not err in finding Dr. Tarala's opinion unpersuasive because the opinion cited no supporting evidence and provided no explanation showing how the stated limitations were reached.
2. The ALJ did not err in concluding that the severity of the restrictions in Dr. Tarala's opinion was inconsistent with the record, including the normal nerve conduction study and other evidence of mostly mild to moderate symptoms managed conservatively.
3. The Commissioner's decision should be affirmed because the ALJ applied the correct legal standards and substantial evidence supported the decision.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Rather, the Commissioner’s determination will only be reversed if the correct legal standards were not applied, or it was not supported by substantial evidence.” (at 3)

“Substantial evidence is ‘more than a mere scintilla,’ meaning that in the record one can find ‘such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.’” (at 3)

“Stated another way, there is nothing Dr. Tarala’s opinion to determine how he reached his conclusions.” (at 14)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff applied for Supplemental Security Income, alleging disability based on physical and mental impairments including degenerative disc disease, shoulder conditions, fibromyalgia, and obesity. The ALJ found that plaintiff had severe impairments but retained the residual functional capacity for light work with postural and hazard-related limitations, had no past relevant work, and could perform jobs existing in significant numbers

in the national economy. Plaintiff challenged the ALJ's treatment of a medical source statement from Dr. James Tarala, which imposed substantially more restrictive physical and attendance limitations.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for Title XVI Supplemental Security Income benefits, and the Social Security Administration denied the application initially and on reconsideration. After a hearing, the ALJ issued an unfavorable decision, and the Appeals Council affirmed, making the decision final. Plaintiff then commenced this action under 42 U.S.C. §§ 405(g) and 1383(c)(3), moved to vacate or remand, and the Commissioner cross-moved for affirmance. The magistrate judge recommended denying plaintiff's motion, granting the Commissioner's motion, and affirming the Commissioner's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Joseph J. B. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 1:23-CV-652 (BKS/CFH), 2024 WL 4217371, at *1 (N.D.N.Y. Aug. 29, 2024), report and recommendation adopted, No. 1:23-CV-652 (BKS/CFH), 2024 WL 4216048 (N.D.N.Y. Sept. 17, 2024)
- Wagner v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 906 F.2d 856, 860 (2d Cir. 1990)
- Johnson v. Bowen, 817 F.2d 983, 985-86 (2d Cir. 1987)
- Berry v. Schweiker, 675 F.2d 464, 467 (2d Cir. 1982)
- Halloran v. Barnhart, 362 F.3d 28, 31 (2d Cir. 2004) (per curiam)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- Brault v. Social Security Administration, Commissioner, 683 F.3d 443, 448 (2d Cir. 2012) (per curiam)
- Martone v. Apfel, 70 F. Supp. 2d 145, 148 (N.D.N.Y. 1999)
- Rosado v. Sullivan, 805 F. Supp. 147, 153 (S.D.N.Y. 1992)
- Barnhart v. Thomas, 540 U.S. 20, 24 (2003)
- DeChirico v. Callahan, 134 F.3d 1177, 1180 (2d Cir. 1998)
- Kathleen A. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 3:20-CV-1034 (LEK), 2022 WL 673824, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 7, 2022)
- Carmen M. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 20-CV-6532 (MJR), 2021 WL 5410550, at *4 (W.D.N.Y. Nov. 19, 2021)
- Galo G. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 20-CV-1011 (FJS), 2021 WL 5232722, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. Nov. 9, 2021)
- Ryan v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 21-2947-CV, 2022 WL 17933217, at *2 (2d Cir. Dec. 27, 2022) (summary order)
- Rivera v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 19-CV-4630 (LJL/BCM), 2020 WL 8167136, at *14 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 30, 2020)

- Andrew G. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 3:19-CV-0942 (ML), 2020 WL 5848776, at *5 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 1, 2020), report and recommendation adopted, 2021 WL 134945 (Jan. 14, 2021)
- Jennifer A. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 1:22-CV-1167 (MAD), 2023 WL 8654215, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. Dec. 13, 2023)
- Eric G. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 5:21-CV-1314 (MAD), 2023 WL 3004780, at *4 n.1 (N.D.N.Y. Jan. 5, 2023)
- Nichole K. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 1:23-CV-858 (EAW), 2024 WL 3022592, at *7 (W.D.N.Y. June 17, 2024)
- Krull v. Colvin, 669 F. App'x 31, 32 (2d Cir. 2016) (summary order)
- Tina W. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 5:22-CV-15 (MAD), 2023 WL 157952, at *7 (N.D.N.Y. Jan. 10, 2023)
- Bonet ex rel. T.B. v. Colvin, 523 F. App'x 58, 59 (2d Cir. 2013) (summary order)
- Wagner v. Commissioner of Social Security, 435 F. Supp. 3d 509, 516 (W.D.N.Y. 2020)
- Dana Marie M. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 6:21-CV-0458 (GLS/CFH), 2022 WL 2314560, at *7 (N.D.N.Y. June 28, 2022), report and recommendation adopted, No. 6:21-CV-0458 (GLS/CFH), 2022 WL 22210128 (N.D.N.Y. Sept. 28, 2022)
- Tammie S. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 3:20-CV-1021 (ML), 2022 WL 356754, at *7 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 7, 2022)
- Jackson v. Kijakazi, 588 F. Supp. 3d 558, 585 (S.D.N.Y. 2022)
- Melissa W. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 1:22-CV-891 (JGW), 2025 WL 1929917, at *9 (W.D.N.Y. July 14, 2025)
- Rosario v. Commissioner of Social Security, 20 Civ. 7749, 2022 WL 819810, at *8 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 18, 2022)
- Roldan v. Racette, 984 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir. 1993)
- Small v. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 892 F.2d 15 (2d Cir. 1989)