

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Armes v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 1:23-cv-00905-SCR (E.D. Cal. Apr. 4, 2025) · No. 1:23-cv-00905-SCR · Decided April 7, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Plaintiff Sherry Lynn Armes’s application for disability insurance benefits. The court denied Plaintiff’s motion for summary judgment, granted the Commissioner’s cross-motion, and upheld the ALJ’s finding that Plaintiff was not disabled.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sean C. Riordan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	April 7, 2025
DOCKET	1:23-cv-00905-SCR
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying her application for disability insurance benefits. The parties filed cross-motions for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court upheld the Commissioner's decision if supported by substantial evidence and based on the correct legal standards. The court reviewed the record as a whole, considered evidence supporting and detracting from the ALJ's conclusion, and could not affirm on grounds not relied upon by the ALJ. Errors were harmless only when clearly inconsequential to the ultimate nondisability determination.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unknown
PARTIES	Sherry Lynn Armes v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

- judicial review of agency action
- administrative law
- disability definition
- ada / disability

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security

administrative law

disability benefits

judicial review

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ properly considered the combination of Armes's impairments when determining her residual functional capacity.
2. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated Dr. Swe Than's medical-source opinion under the supportability and consistency requirements of 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1520c and 416.920c.
3. Whether substantial evidence supported the ALJ's finding at step four that Armes could perform her past relevant work as a prescription clerk and optical technician.
4. Whether the ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons for discounting Armes's subjective symptom testimony.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ adequately considered Armes's relevant impairments and substantial evidence supported the finding that she could perform light work with additional limitations.
2. The ALJ properly discounted Dr. Than's opinion because it was inadequately supported and inconsistent with the record.
3. Substantial evidence supported the ALJ's finding that Armes could perform her past relevant work as a prescription clerk and optical technician.
4. The ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting Armes's subjective symptom testimony.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The Commissioner’s decision that a claimant is not disabled will be upheld “if it is supported by substantial evidence and if the Commissioner applied the correct legal standards.”” (at 2)

“The ALJ identified numerous inconsistencies between Plaintiff’s subjective testimony and the medical record evidence.” (at 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Armes applied for disability insurance benefits, alleging disability beginning May 25, 2020, when she was sixty years old. The ALJ found severe impairments consisting of congestive heart failure, atrial paroxysmal fibrillation, degenerative joint disease of the left knee, and obesity, but found that she retained the residual functional capacity for light work with specified postural and environmental limitations. The ALJ found that she could perform her past relevant work as a prescription clerk and optical technician. The district court relied on evidence of generally intact strength, gait, musculoskeletal findings, and improved or controlled symptoms, including cardiac improvement after ablation and pain control with tramadol.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Armes applied for disability insurance benefits on March 18, 2021, alleging disability beginning May 25, 2020. The application was denied initially and on reconsideration. After a June 23, 2022 telephonic hearing, ALJ Joseph Doyle found her not disabled on July 5, 2022. The Appeals Council denied review, and Armes filed this action on June 15, 2023. The district court denied Armes's motion for summary judgment, granted the Commissioner's cross-motion, entered judgment for the Commissioner, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Howard ex rel. Wolff v. Barnhart, 341 F.3d 1006, 1011 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Andrews v. Shalala, 53 F.3d 1035, 1039 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1111 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 103 (2019)
- Widmark v. Barnhart, 454 F.3d 1063, 1066 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Desrosiers v. Secretary of HHS, 846 F.2d 573, 576 (9th Cir. 1988)
- Jones v. Heckler, 760 F.2d 993, 995 (9th Cir. 1985)
- Edlund v. Massanari, 253 F.3d 1152, 1156 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 954 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Orn v. Astrue, 495 F.3d 625, 630 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Connett v. Barnhart, 340 F.3d 871, 874 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Robbins v. Social Security Administration, 466 F.3d 880, 885 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Stout v. Commissioner, 454 F.3d 1050, 1055 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 679 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Bowen v. Yuckert, 482 U.S. 137, 140 (1987)
- Barnhart v. Thomas, 540 U.S. 20, 24-25 (2003)
- Hill v. Astrue, 698 F.3d 1153, 1161 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Ford v. Saul, 950 F.3d 1141, 1155 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Woods v. Kijakazi, 32 F.4th 785, 788 (9th Cir. 2022)
- GN Resound A/S v. Callpod, Inc., 2013 WL 1190651, at *5 (N.D. Cal. 2013)
- Hall v. Mortgage Investors Group, 2011 WL 4374995, at *5 (E.D. Cal. 2011)
- Zamani v. Carnes, 491 F.3d 990, 997 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Stubbs-Danielson v. Astrue, 539 F.3d 1169, 1175-76 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Bayliss v. Barnhart, 427 F.3d 1211, 1217 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Bray v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 554 F.3d 1219, 1222 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1014 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Fair v. Bowen, 885 F.2d 597, 603 (9th Cir. 1989)

- Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 958-59 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Warre v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 439 F.3d 1001, 1006 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Jones v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 2023 WL 346824, at *10-11 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 20, 2023)

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