

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Ryan Copertino v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Civil No. 1:24-CV-1949 · No. 1:24-CV-1949 · Decided February 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania reviews Ryan Copertino’s appeal from the denial of his applications for Social Security disability insurance benefits and supplemental security income. The court concludes that the Administrative Law Judge’s residual functional capacity assessment, evaluation of the medical opinions and subjective symptoms, and determination at step five are supported by substantial evidence. The court therefore affirms the Commissioner’s decision denying benefits.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daryl F. Bloom
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	February 17, 2026
DOCKET	1:24-CV-1949
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) from the Commissioner's denial of applications for disability insurance benefits and supplemental security income.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed whether the Commissioner's factual findings were supported by substantial evidence and whether the correct legal standards were applied. It could not reweigh the evidence or substitute its judgment for that of the ALJ, but was required to determine whether the ALJ adequately articulated the basis for the decision.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district-court memorandum opinion
PARTIES	Ryan Copertino v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's RFC limitation to simple instructions adequately addressed the opinion that Copertino could perform one- and two-step tasks.
2. Whether any inconsistency existed between the RFC and the reasoning levels of the occupations identified by the vocational expert, and whether any such error was harmful.
3. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated Copertino's subjective symptoms and adequately explained why his allegations were not entirely consistent with the record.
4. Whether the ALJ's evaluation of the medical-opinion evidence and formulation of the RFC were supported by substantial evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ adequately addressed the limitation by restricting Copertino to carrying out simple instructions, even though the RFC did not use the exact phrase "one-to-two-step tasks."
2. Any error concerning the relationship between the simple-instructions limitation and the reasoning-level-two occupations was harmless because the vocational expert identified a reasoning-level-one night-cleaner occupation that the claimant could perform.
3. The ALJ's evaluation of Copertino's subjective symptoms was supported by substantial evidence and adequately explained.
4. The ALJ's decision denying Copertino's applications for benefits was supported by substantial evidence and resulted from application of the correct legal standards.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Substantial evidence "does not mean a large or considerable amount of evidence, but rather such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion."" (19)

"Thus, the question before us is not whether the claimant is disabled, but rather whether the Commissioner's finding that he or she is not disabled is supported by substantial evidence and was based upon a correct application of the law." (21)

"Thus, while Copertino challenges the ALJ's credibility determination, we are not permitted at this stage to reweigh the evidence, and instead must simply determine whether the ALJ's decision was supported by "substantial evidence."" (36)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Copertino alleged disability based primarily on anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms, including panic attacks, obsessive thoughts, mood changes, and difficulty concentrating. The record documented periods of suicidal ideation, psychiatric treatment, medication changes, counseling, and varying mental-status findings, but also showed coherent thought processes, generally intact attention and concentration, completion of a college degree, independent living, household activities, social interaction, and part-time work. The ALJ found severe mental impairments but determined that they did not meet or equal a listed impairment and imposed substantial nonexertional limitations in the RFC.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Copertino applied for disability insurance benefits and supplemental security income on February 28, 2022. After a November 30, 2023 administrative hearing, the ALJ denied the applications on February 5, 2024, finding that Copertino was not disabled and could perform several occupations. Copertino sought judicial review, arguing that the RFC, evaluation of medical opinions, and assessment of his subjective symptoms were not supported by substantial evidence. The court affirmed the Commissioner's decision and denied the appeal.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- 139 S. Ct. 1148, 1154 (2019)
- 487 U.S. 552, 565 (1988)
- 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- 994 F.2d 1058, 1064 (3d Cir. 1993)
- 710 F.2d 110, 114 (3d Cir. 1983)
- 383 U.S. 607, 620 (1966)
- 304 F. Supp. 2d 623, 627 (M.D. Pa. 2003)
- 2014 WL 940205, at *1 (M.D. Pa. Mar. 11, 2014)
- 512 F. Supp. 913, 914 (W.D. Pa. 1981)
- 900 F.2d 675, 678 (3d Cir. 1990)
- 777 F.3d 607, 611-12 (3d Cir. 2014)
- 220 F.3d 112, 119, 121 (3d Cir. 2000)
- 577 F.3d 500, 504, 506 (3d Cir. 2009)
- 642 F.2d 700, 704 (3d Cir. 1981)
- 312 F.3d 113, 129 (3d Cir. 2002)
- 174 F. App'x 6, 11 (3d Cir. 2006)
- 962 F. Supp. 2d 761, 778-79 (W.D. Pa. 2013)
- 129 F. Supp. 3d 209, 214-15 (W.D. Pa. 2015)
- 667 F.3d 356, 361, 363 (3d Cir. 2011)

- 994 F.2d 1058, 1066 (3d Cir. 1993)
- 191 F. Supp. 3d 429, 455 (M.D. Pa. 2016)
- 639 F. App'x 810, 814 (3d Cir. 2016)
- 72 F. Supp. 3d 479, 494 (D. Del. 2014)
- 777 F.3d 607, 616 (3d Cir. 2014)
- 2024 WL 3161865, at *9-10 (W.D. Pa. June 24, 2024)
- 70 F.4th 1251, 1257 (9th Cir. 2023)
- 916 F.3d 307, 314 (4th Cir. 2019)

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