

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
ARKANSAS, FORT SMITH DIVISION

Curtis Hillard, Jr. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner, Social Security
Administration

Civil No. 2:24-cv-02151-TLB-MEF · No. Civil No. 2:24-cv-02151-TLB-MEF · Decided January 21, 2026

SUMMARY

A magistrate judge recommends reversal and remand of the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Curtis Hillard, Jr.’s claim for disability insurance benefits. The report concludes that substantial evidence did not support the ALJ’s residual functional capacity determination that Hillard could perform light work with limited postural restrictions. The recommendation would remand the case under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) for further consideration of the RFC.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fort Smith Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mark E. Ford
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fort Smith Division
DECIDED	January 21, 2026
DOCKET	Civil No. 2:24-cv-02151-TLB-MEF
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's denial of disability insurance benefits. The magistrate judge issued a Report and Recommendation recommending reversal and sentence-four remand for further consideration of the residual functional capacity determination.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether substantial evidence in the administrative record supports the Commissioner's decision. Substantial evidence is less than a preponderance but sufficient for a reasonable mind to find the evidence adequate. The court must affirm if substantial evidence supports the ALJ's decision, even if the record also supports a contrary outcome.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

PARTIES

Curtis Hillard, Jr. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner, Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

disability definition

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability benefits

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ fully and fairly developed the administrative record.
2. Whether Hillard's mental impairments were severe.
3. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated Hillard's subjective complaints.
4. Whether substantial evidence supported the ALJ's residual functional capacity determination that Hillard could perform light work with occasional stooping and climbing.

HOLDINGS

1. The court must affirm the ALJ's decision if substantial evidence in the record supports it, and may not reverse merely because the record also contains evidence supporting a contrary result or because the court would have reached a different decision.
2. Substantial evidence did not support the ALJ's determination that Hillard could perform light work with only occasional stooping and climbing restrictions; the case should be remanded for further consideration of the RFC.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Accordingly, we cannot say that substantial evidence supports the ALJ's conclusion that the Plaintiff can perform light work with only stooping and climbing restrictions."

"Based on the foregoing, it is RECOMMENDED that the Commissioner's decision be reversed, and the case remanded back to the Commissioner for further consideration pursuant to sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g)."

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hillard injured his back at work in January 2020 and thereafter reported persistent thoracic and lumbar pain radiating into his legs, with limitations in bending, stooping, twisting, lifting, sitting, standing, and walking. Imaging showed disc degeneration, disc desiccation, reduced disc height, and disc bulging, although several examinations and an EMG were substantially normal and no surgical intervention was recommended. He underwent medication management, physical therapy, injections, chiropractic treatment, and specialist evaluations, with continuing pain and differing medical opinions regarding his functional capacity. The ALJ adopted agency physicians' opinions that Hillard could perform light work with occasional stooping and

climbing, but the magistrate judge found that the record contained evidence supporting greater limitations, including a need to alternate positions and an inability to lift more than ten pounds.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hillard applied for disability insurance benefits in May 2021, alleging disability beginning March 1, 2020. An administrative law judge denied the claim on December 19, 2023, finding severe spinal impairments but concluding that Hillard could perform light work with limited stooping and climbing and could perform several occupations. The Appeals Council denied review on September 26, 2024. Hillard filed this action on November 20, 2024, and after briefing the magistrate judge recommended reversal and remand.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand to the Commissioner under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) for further consideration of Hillard's residual functional capacity, including the evidence concerning limitations in sitting, standing, walking, bending, stooping, twisting, lifting, carrying, and the possible need to alternate positions.

CASES CITED

- Vossen v. Astrue, 612 F.3d 1011, 1015 (8th Cir. 2010)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 139 S. Ct. 1148, 1154 (2019)
- Blackburn v. Colvin, 761 F.3d 853, 858 (8th Cir. 2014)
- Miller v. Colvin, 784 F.3d 472, 477 (8th Cir. 2015)
- Pearsall v. Massanari, 274 F.3d 1211, 1217 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Montgomery v. O'Malley, 122 F.4th 1059, 1064 (8th Cir. 2024)
- Perks v. Astrue, 687 F.3d 1086, 1092 (8th Cir. 2012)
- Jones v. Astrue, 619 F.3d 963, 971 (8th Cir. 2010)
- Davidson v. Astrue, 578 F.3d 838, 844 (8th Cir. 2009)