

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
ARKANSAS, FAYETTEVILLE DIVISION

Christopher Musteen v. Commissioner, Social Security
Administration

Case No. 5:24-CV-05243 (W.D. Ark. 2026) · No. 5:24-CV-05243 · Decided March 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas reviewed Christopher Musteen’s objection to a magistrate judge’s recommendation that the denial of Social Security disability benefits be affirmed. The court concluded that the Administrative Law Judge’s residual functional capacity determination, including the treatment of headache-related limitations, was supported by substantial evidence. The court overruled the objection, adopted the Report and Recommendation, affirmed the denial of benefits, and dismissed the case with prejudice.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fayetteville Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Timothy L. Brooks
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fayetteville Division
DECIDED	March 20, 2026
DOCKET	5:24-CV-05243
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review of the Commissioner's denial of Social Security disability benefits. After a magistrate judge recommended affirmance, Plaintiff objected, and the district court conducted de novo review of the challenged portions of the report and recommendation.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court reviews the ALJ's decision de novo for legal error and determines whether the findings are supported by substantial evidence on the record as a whole. The court must affirm when substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's decision, even if substantial evidence could support a contrary result.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court memorandum opinion

PARTIES

Christopher Musteen v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability benefits

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly failed to include additional limitations based on Musteen's subjective reports of headache-related symptoms.
3. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated and discounted Musteen's subjective testimony under the applicable factors.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's determination that Musteen could perform sedentary work with specified limitations was supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole.
2. The ALJ properly evaluated and discounted Musteen's subjective allegations concerning the severity and functional effects of his headaches because those allegations were inconsistent with the medical evidence, daily activities, and response to treatment.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A social security claimant's RFC is “the most [he] can still do despite [his] limitations.”” (Doc. 8, p. 21)

“An impairment which can be controlled by treatment or medication is not considered disabling.” (Doc. 8, pp. 30-34)

“the ALJ was not obligated to include limitations from opinions he properly disregarded.” (Doc. 8, pp. 30-34)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Musteen alleged disability based on PTSD, orthopedic impairments, radiculopathy, headaches, traumatic brain injury, and other conditions. After remand by the Appeals Council and a second administrative hearing, the ALJ found several severe impairments but determined that Musteen retained the residual functional capacity for sedentary work with postural, manipulative, environmental, and mental restrictions. The ALJ discounted the alleged severity of Musteen's headache-related limitations based on his daily activities, treatment history, and improvement from Botox injections and other medication.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Musteen applied for disability insurance benefits, was denied initially and on reconsideration, and received an administrative hearing. The ALJ initially denied benefits, the Appeals Council remanded, and following a second hearing the ALJ again denied benefits on May 13, 2024. A magistrate judge recommended affirmance, and the district court overruled Musteen's objection, adopted the report and recommendation, affirmed the ALJ's decision, and dismissed the case with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Brown v. Colvin, 825 F.3d 936, 939 (8th Cir. 2016)
- Blackburn v. Colvin, 761 F.3d 853, 858 (8th Cir. 2014)
- Lawson v. Colvin, 807 F.3d 962, 964 (8th Cir. 2015)
- Miller v. Colvin, 784 F.3d 472, 477 (8th Cir. 2015)
- Hensley v. Colvin, 829 F.3d 926, 932 (8th Cir. 2016)
- Goff v. Barnhart, 421 F.3d 785, 790, 792 (8th Cir. 2005)
- Pearsall v. Massanari, 274 F.3d 1211, 1218 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Wildman v. Astrue, 596 F.3d 959, 968-969 (8th Cir. 2010)
- Polaski v. Heckler, 739 F.2d 1320, 1322 (8th Cir. 1984)
- Hogan v. Apfel, 239 F.3d 958, 962 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Dixon v. Sullivan, 905 F.2d 237, 238 (8th Cir. 1990)
- Estes v. Barnhart, 275 F.3d 722, 725 (8th Cir. 2002)
- Tellez v. Barnhart, 403 F.3d 953, 957 (8th Cir. 2005)
- Haggard v. Apfel, 175 F.3d 591, 595 (8th Cir. 1999)