

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

Caron C. v. Commissioner Social Security Administration

No. 2:25-cv-00204-CL (D. Or. Apr. 2026) · No. 2:25-cv-00204-CL · Decided April 6, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Oregon reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Caron Cox’s application for Disability Insurance Benefits. The court rejected challenges concerning development of the record, step-two and step-three findings, evaluation of symptom testimony, and the step-five vocational analysis. The court affirmed the Commissioner’s decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mark D. Clarke
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
DECIDED	April 6, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-cv-00204-CL
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Caron C. sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying Disability Insurance Benefits.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court reviews whether the ALJ's findings are supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole and are free from legal error. The court may not substitute its judgment for the ALJ's where the evidence is in equipoise and may not affirm on a ground the agency did not invoke.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion
PARTIES	Caron C. v. Commissioner Social Security Administration

TOPICS

- judicial review of agency action
- disability definition
- administrative law
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Social Security disability benefits
- administrative law
- federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ failed to develop the record or denied Plaintiff due process by failing to obtain additional pre-date-last-insured evidence or call a medical expert.
2. Whether the ALJ harmfully erred at step two by finding that obstructive sleep apnea and bilateral-hand osteoarthritis were not severe impairments.
3. Whether the ALJ adequately evaluated whether Plaintiff's impairments met or medically equaled a listed impairment at step three.
4. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons for discounting Plaintiff's symptom testimony.
5. Whether the ALJ's step-five vocational finding was supported by a complete hypothetical and substantial evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ did not fail to develop the record or deny Plaintiff due process because the record contained medical evidence from the relevant period and Plaintiff did not show that the evidence was ambiguous or inadequate.
2. The ALJ did not err in finding that Plaintiff's obstructive sleep apnea and bilateral-hand osteoarthritis were not severe impairments during the relevant period.
3. The ALJ reasonably determined that Plaintiff's impairments did not meet or medically equal a listed impairment during the relevant period.
4. The ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons supported by substantial evidence for finding that Plaintiff's symptom allegations were not fully consistent with the record.
5. The ALJ's step-five finding was supported by substantial evidence because Plaintiff's challenge to the hypothetical depended on limitations that the ALJ reasonably rejected.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"At step two of the disability evaluation process, the ALJ decides whether a claimant's impairment, or combination of impairments, is "severe" within the meaning of the Regulations." (8)

"If a hypothetical to a vocational expert does not reflect all the claimant's limitations, it "has not evidentiary value to support a finding that the claimant can perform jobs in the national economy." (10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff applied for Disability Insurance Benefits under Title II, alleging disability beginning October 1, 2020, although her date last insured was March 31, 2013. The ALJ considered records from before the date last insured, found degenerative joint disease of the right knee and obesity severe, and determined that Plaintiff retained the capacity for a restricted range of light work. The ALJ found that Plaintiff could not perform past relevant work but could perform jobs existing in significant numbers in the national economy. The district court upheld the ALJ's treatment of the medical evidence, symptom testimony, listing analysis, and vocational evidence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff protectively filed an application for Disability Insurance Benefits, which was denied. After a hearing, the Administrative Law Judge denied benefits, and the Appeals Council declined to alter the decision, making it the Commissioner's final determination. The district court reviewed the administrative record and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Bass v. Soc. Sec. Admin., 872 F.2d 832, 833 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1097-98 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Luther v. Berryhill, 891 F.3d 872, 875 (9th Cir. 2018)
- Matney v. Sullivan, 981 F.2d 1016, 1018 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Smolen v. Chater, 80 F.3d 1273, 1279 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- Martinez v. Heckler, 807 F.2d 771, 772 (9th Cir. 1986)
- Treichler v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec. Admin., 775 F.3d 1090, 1098 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Consolo v. Fed. Mar. Comm'n, 383 U.S. 607, 621 (1966)
- Stout v. Comm'r, Soc. Sec. Admin., 454 F.3d 1050, 1054 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Mayes v. Massanari, 276 F.3d 453, 459-60 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Wellington v. Berryhill, 878 F.3d 867, 872 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Webb v. Barnhart, 433 F.3d 683, 685, 687 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Jamerson v. Chater, 112 F.3d 1064, 1067 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Lewis v. Apfel, 236 F.3d 503, 512 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Ford v. Saul, 950 F.3d 1141, 1148 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Vasquez v. Astrue, 572 F.3d 586, 591 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Lingenfelter v. Astrue, 504 F.3d 1028, 1036 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 680 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1016 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Diedrich v. Berryhill, 874 F.3d 634, 643 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Smartt v. Kijakazi, 53 F.4th 489, 499 (9th Cir. 2022)
- DeLorme v. Sullivan, 924 F.2d 841, 850 (9th Cir. 1991)
- Stubbs-Danielson v. Astrue, 539 F.3d 1169, 1175 (9th Cir. 2008)

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