

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

Amara Shepherd, o/b/o J.T.L.J. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner,
Social Security Administration

Shepherd v. Bisignano, Civil No. 2:25-cv-02048 (W.D. Ark. Jan. 30, 2026) · No. 2:25-cv-02048 · Decided
January 30, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas reviewed the denial of a minor’s application for Supplemental Security Income benefits. The court held that the administrative law judge’s findings regarding the child’s impairments, functional domains, medical and educational evidence, and subjective complaints were supported by substantial evidence, and affirmed the Commissioner’s decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fort Smith Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Spencer G. Singleton
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Fort Smith Division
DECIDED	January 30, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-cv-02048
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Action under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) seeking judicial review of the Commissioner's final decision denying a minor child's application for supplemental security income benefits. The parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether the Commissioner's findings are supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole. 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 substantial evidence also supports a contrary outcome.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Amara Shepherd, o/b/o J.T.L.J. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner,
Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

disability definition

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security

administrative law

disability benefits

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's determination that J.T.L.J.'s impairments did not meet, medically equal, or functionally equal a listed impairment was supported by substantial evidence.
2. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated the medical, educational, and other nonmedical evidence.
3. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated the subjective allegations concerning J.T.L.J.'s functional limitations under 20 C.F.R. § 416.929(c) and Polaski.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's determination that J.T.L.J. was not disabled and that his impairments did not meet, medically equal, or functionally equal a listed impairment was supported by substantial evidence.
2. The ALJ properly evaluated J.T.L.J.'s subjective allegations and was not required to methodically discuss each regulatory factor so long as the ALJ acknowledged and examined the relevant factors before discounting the allegations.
3. A child's impairment is functionally equivalent to a listed impairment only if the child has marked limitations in two functional domains or an extreme limitation in one domain.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"After reviewing the entire transcript, the Court finds substantial evidence supporting the ALJ's findings in this case." (Tr. 18-23)

"Based on the foregoing, the undersigned concludes that the decision of the ALJ, denying benefits to J.T.L.J. is supported by substantial evidence and should be affirmed." (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

J.T.L.J., a minor, applied for childhood supplemental security income alleging disability beginning February 15, 2015. The ALJ found medically determinable impairments of borderline intellectual functioning, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and asthma, but determined that they caused no more than minimal functional limitations and did not meet, medically equal, or functionally equal a listed impairment. In evaluating the six functional domains, the ALJ considered medical records, consultative and state-agency opinions, school records, teacher questionnaires, and reports from J.T.L.J.'s mother.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff's mother filed a childhood disability application on behalf of J.T.L.J. in June 2021. The Social Security Administration denied the application initially and on reconsideration; following a February 1, 2024 hearing, the ALJ issued an unfavorable decision on April 3, 2024. The Appeals Council denied review on March 6, 2025, and Plaintiff filed this action. The district court affirmed the ALJ's decision and directed entry of judgment.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Ramirez v. Barnhart, 292 F.3d 576, 583 (8th Cir. 2002)
- Johnson v. Apfel, 240 F.3d 1145, 1147 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Haley v. Massanari, 258 F.3d 742, 747 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Young v. Apfel, 221 F.3d 1065, 1068 (8th Cir. 2000)
- Polaski v. Heckler, 739 F.2d 1320 (8th Cir. 1984)
- Lowe v. Apfel, 226 F.3d 969, 971-72 (8th Cir. 2000)