

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Ronnie Cruz v. Leland Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social
Security

Cruz v. Dudek · No. 1:24-cv-0169 JLT GSA · Decided March 21, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California adopted the magistrate judge’s findings and recommendations in Ronnie Cruz’s Social Security disability benefits appeal. The court granted Plaintiff’s motion, denied the Commissioner’s request to affirm, remanded the matter for further proceedings under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g), and directed entry of judgment for Plaintiff.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jennifer L. Thurston
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	March 21, 2025
DOCKET	1:24-cv-0169 JLT GSA
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review of the Commissioner's final decision denying disability insurance benefits. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending that Plaintiff's appeal be granted and the matter remanded. Neither party objected, and the district court conducted de novo review and adopted the findings and recommendations.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the findings and recommendations under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); judicial review of the Commissioner's decision for substantial evidence and application of the proper legal standards.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Ronnie Cruz v. Leland Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

summary judgment

remedies

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the magistrate judge's findings and recommendations should be adopted after de novo review under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).
2. Whether the Commissioner's denial of disability insurance benefits was supported by substantial evidence and based on application of the proper legal standards.
3. Whether the action should be remanded for further administrative proceedings under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).

HOLDINGS

1. The findings and recommendations were supported by the record and proper analysis and were adopted in full after the district court's de novo review.
2. The denial was not supported by substantial evidence because the ALJ failed to address evidence concerning Plaintiff's decreased visual acuity at step three of the sequential evaluation and failed to apply the proper legal standards to determine Plaintiff's functional limitations.
3. Remand for further administrative proceedings was appropriate under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The magistrate judge found substantial evidence did not support the decision finding Plaintiff was not disabled, because the ALJ failed to address evidence concerning Plaintiff’s decreased visual acuity at step three of the sequential evaluation and did not apply the proper legal standards to determine Plaintiff’s functional limitations.” (at 1)

“Having carefully reviewed the matter, the Court concludes the Findings and Recommendations are supported by the record and proper analysis.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Ronnie Cruz sought disability insurance benefits under Title II of the Social Security Act. The ALJ denied his application, but the magistrate judge found that the decision was not supported by substantial evidence because the ALJ failed to address evidence of decreased visual acuity at step three of the sequential evaluation and did not apply the proper legal standards in determining Cruz's functional limitations.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Ronnie Cruz applied for disability insurance benefits under Title II of the Social Security Act, and the Administrative Law Judge denied the application. The magistrate judge determined that substantial evidence did not support the denial because the ALJ failed to address evidence concerning decreased visual acuity at step three and failed to apply the proper legal standards in determining functional limitations. The district court adopted the magistrate judge's findings and recommendations, granted Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment or remand, denied the Commissioner's request to affirm, and remanded for further administrative proceedings.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The matter is remanded to the Commissioner for further administrative proceedings pursuant to sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g). The Clerk must enter judgment in favor of Ronnie Cruz and against Leland Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security.

CASES CITED

- Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 838-39 (9th Cir. 2014)

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