

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND

Molly C., as Estate Administrator for Nicholas C. (deceased), v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of the Social Security Administration

Bisignano · No. C.A. No. 25-258-PAS · Decided April 8, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island reviews a Social Security Administration decision denying Nicholas C.'s application for Disability Insurance Benefits. The court rejects arguments that the administrative law judge failed to account for treatment noncompliance allegedly caused by mental impairments and failed to address absenteeism or off-task limitations. The court denies the plaintiff's motion to reverse, grants the Commissioner's motion to affirm, and directs entry of judgment for the defendant.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Patricia A. Sullivan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island
DECIDED	April 8, 2026
DOCKET	C.A. No. 25-258-PAS
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review of the Commissioner of Social Security's denial of Disability Insurance Benefits and moved to reverse and remand. The Commissioner moved to affirm.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether the Commissioner applied the correct legal standard and whether the decision is supported by substantial evidence. Substantial evidence means such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. The court may not reweigh the evidence or substitute its judgment for that of the Commissioner.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Molly C., as Estate Administrator for Nicholas C. (deceased) v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of the Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

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PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

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disability benefits

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on limited mental-health treatment without considering whether Nicholas C.'s mental impairments deprived him of the rationality to decide whether to continue treatment.
2. Whether the ALJ erred by finding that Nicholas C. could sustain a normal workday and workweek despite moderate limitations identified by non-examining psychologists.
3. Whether the ALJ was required to conduct a separate absenteeism or off-task-time analysis.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ did not err in considering the limited specialty mental-health treatment and treatment history when evaluating the intensity and persistence of the claimant's symptoms. The record did not show a failure to follow prescribed treatment caused by mental impairment, and substantial evidence independently supported the ALJ's assessment.
2. The ALJ did not err in finding that the claimant could sustain a normal work schedule. The non-examining psychologists expressly found that he could sustain a normal work routine despite moderate limitations in specified functional areas.
3. Moderate mental limitations are not per se preclusive of the ability to work.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Substantial evidence “means – and means only – such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.””

“The Court does not reinterpret or reweigh the evidence or otherwise substitute its own judgment for that of the Commissioner.”

“moderate” mental limitations are not per se work preclusive.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Nicholas C. worked for many years as a senior administrator for the Rhode Island state courts, but his employment ended in December 2022. He alleged disability from panic attacks, depression, obsessive-

compulsive personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, with an alleged onset date of December 12, 2022. The ALJ found severe mental impairments but concluded that he retained the capacity for simple instructions, limited coworker and supervisor interaction, no public interaction, occasional workplace changes, and no work requiring a specific production rate. The district court relied on treatment records showing improvement in symptoms, appropriate use of prescribed medication, continued primary-care treatment, and no medical opinion supporting greater limitations or excessive absenteeism or off-task time.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Nicholas C. applied for Disability Insurance Benefits, alleging disability beginning December 12, 2022, based primarily on mental impairments. An administrative law judge found severe mental impairments but determined that he retained a residual functional capacity for simple work with specified social, adaptation, and production-rate restrictions. After Nicholas C.'s death, his estate administrator was substituted as plaintiff. The district court, exercising consent jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), denied the motion to reverse, granted the Commissioner's motion to affirm, and directed entry of judgment for the Commissioner.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Cote v. Rhode Island, No. 24-cv-75-PB-AKJ, 2025 WL 691387, at *1, 5 (D.R.I. Mar. 4, 2025)
- Purdy v. Berryhill, 887 F.3d 7, 13 (1st Cir. 2018)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 103 (2019)
- Dickinson v. Zurko, 527 U.S. 150, 153, 162-63 (1999)
- Irlanda Ortiz v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 955 F.2d 765, 769 (1st Cir. 1992) (per curiam)
- Rodriguez Pagan v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 819 F.2d 1, 3 (1st Cir. 1987) (per curiam)
- Frustaglia v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 829 F.2d 192, 195 (1st Cir. 1987) (per curiam)
- Brown v. Apfel, 71 F. Supp. 2d 28, 30 (D.R.I. 1999), aff'd, 230 F.3d 1347 (1st Cir. 2000) (per curiam)
- Parker v. Bowen, 793 F.2d 1177, 1180 (11th Cir. 1986) (per curiam)
- Thomas P. v. Kijakazi, C.A. No. 21-00020-WES, 2022 WL 92651, at *8 (D.R.I. Jan. 10, 2022)
- Sacilowski v. Saul, 959 F.3d 431, 434 (1st Cir. 2020)
- Wells v. Barnhart, 267 F. Supp. 2d 138, 144 (D. Mass. 2003)
- Elizabeth V. v. O'Malley, C.A. No. 23-00459-WES, 2024 WL 1460354, at *3 (D.R.I. Apr. 4, 2024)
- Samantha B. v. Bisignano, C.A. No. 25-00004MSM, 2025 WL 2992378, at *6 (D.R.I. Oct. 24, 2025), adopted, 2025 WL 3283309 (D.R.I. Nov. 25, 2025)
- Steven A. v. O'Malley, No. 23-cv-544-WES, 2024 WL 4344865, at *6 (D.R.I. Sept. 30, 2024)
- Halla v. Colvin, Case No. 15-cv-30021-KAR, 2016 WL 234802, at *7 (D. Mass. Jan. 20, 2016)
- Warnell v. O'Malley, 97 F.4th 1050, 1053 (7th Cir. 2024)

- Pelkey v. Saul, Civil Action No. 1:19-cv-11479-IT, 2021 WL 1940621, at *5-6 (D. Mass. May 14, 2021)
- Frankhauser v. Barnhart, 403 F. Supp. 2d 261, 277-78 (W.D.N.Y. 2005)
- Flood v. Colvin, No. 15-2030, 2016 WL 6500641, at *1 (1st Cir. Oct. 20, 2016)
- Kellilea F. v. Kijakazi, C.A. No. 21-00410-JJM, 2022 WL 2128625, at *8 (D.R.I. June 14, 2022)
- Austin B. v. O'Malley, C.A. No. 23-519-PAS, 2024 WL 3329754, at *3 (D.R.I. July 8, 2024)
- Marissa L. v. Bisignano, C.A. No. 24-323MRD, 2025 WL 2463218, at *6 (D.R.I. Aug. 26, 2025)
- Askew v. O'Malley, No. 24-1051, 2024 WL 4362258, at *2 (1st Cir. Sept. 23, 2024)
- Ortiz v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 890 F.2d 520, 527 (1st Cir. 1989)
- Degraffenreid v. Colvin, No. 15-cv-10185-ADB, 2016 WL 5109509, at *7 (D. Mass. Sept. 20, 2016)

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