

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
KENTUCKY, PADUCAH DIVISION

Deborah L. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Deborah L. · No. 5:25-cv-16-LLK · Decided March 31, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Kentucky reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security's denial of the plaintiff's claims for Disability Insurance Benefits and Supplemental Security Income. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge's residual functional capacity assessment and decision were supported by substantial evidence, and that any omission concerning gradual and occasional situational changes was harmless in light of vocational-expert testimony. The court affirmed the Commissioner's final decision and dismissed the complaint.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Kentucky, Paducah Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Lanny King
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Kentucky, Paducah Division
DECIDED	March 31, 2026
DOCKET	5:25-cv-16-LLK
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying her claims for Disability Insurance Benefits and Supplemental Security Income. The parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether the ALJ applied the correct legal standards and whether the decision is supported by substantial evidence. The court may not try the case de novo, resolve evidentiary conflicts, or decide credibility questions.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Deborah L. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity assessment adequately accounted for the moderate limitation in adapting and managing oneself identified at step three.
2. Whether any omission from the RFC of a limitation requiring adaptation to gradual and occasional situational changes was harmless in light of the vocational expert's testimony.
3. Whether the Commissioner's final decision was supported by substantial evidence and made under the proper legal standards.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ did not commit reversible error by omitting verbatim from the RFC the state-agency limitation that Plaintiff adapt to situational changes that are gradual and occasional.
2. Any error in failing to include the limitation that situational changes be gradual and occasional was harmless because the vocational expert identified jobs existing in significant numbers in the national economy under a more restrictive hypothetical that included that limitation.
3. The Commissioner's final decision denying DIB and SSI benefits was supported by substantial evidence and complied with applicable law.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"After careful consideration of the entire record, the undersigned finds that the claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform medium work as defined in 20 CFR 404.1567(c) and 416.967(c)." (DN 12 at 31)

"She could adapt to work demands and situational changes that are gradual and occasional." (DN 12 at 54)

"Ultimately, the ALJ's Decision finding Plaintiff not disabled is supported by substantial evidence, and a remand would be futile." (DN 12 at 26-34)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning October 27, 2021, based on visual, musculoskeletal, thyroid, depressive, anxiety, and related impairments. The ALJ found severe impairments including anxiety, depression, a status-post left-wrist ORIF, and a history of back and neck pain and surgery, but determined that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for medium work with specified mental and social limitations. A vocational expert testified that Plaintiff could perform her past work as a salesclerk under the stated RFC and could perform other jobs in significant numbers under a more restrictive hypothetical involving gradual and occasional situational changes.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for DIB and SSI, and the claims were denied initially and on reconsideration. After a July 11, 2024 telephonic hearing, the ALJ issued an unfavorable decision on September 5, 2024, finding that Plaintiff was not disabled. The Appeals Council denied review on December 6, 2024, making the ALJ's decision final. The district court affirmed the Commissioner's decision and dismissed the complaint.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Rogers v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 486 F.3d 234, 241 (6th Cir. 2007)
- McGlothlin v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 299 F. App'x 516, 522 (6th Cir. 2008)
- White v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 572 F.3d 272, 281 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Cutlip v. Sec'y of Health & Hum. Servs., 25 F.3d 284, 296 (6th Cir. 1994)
- Blakley v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 581 F.3d 399, 405 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Heston v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 245 F.3d 528, 535 (6th Cir. 2001)
- Sallaz v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 23-3825, 2024 WL 2955645, at *6 (6th Cir. June 12, 2024)
- Reeves v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 618 F. App'x 267, 275 (6th Cir. 2015)
- Branon v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 539 F. App'x 675, 680 (6th Cir. 2013)
- Pasco v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 137 F. App'x 828, 845 (6th Cir. 2005)
- Kornecky v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 167 F. App'x 496, 508 (6th Cir. 2006)