

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA, CHARLOTTESVILLE DIVISION

Marnie W. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Marnie W. · No. 3:25-cv-00027 · Decided May 21, 2026

SUMMARY

This Report and Recommendation addresses Marnie W.’s challenge to the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of disability insurance benefits. The magistrate judge concludes that substantial evidence does not support the administrative law judge’s residual functional capacity assessment, particularly regarding the evaluation of medical opinions and the claimant’s statements about her symptoms and daily activities. The recommendation is to reverse the Commissioner’s decision and remand the case under the fourth sentence of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Charlottesville Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Joel C. Hoppe, United States Magistrate Judge
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Charlottesville Division
DECIDED	May 21, 2026
DOCKET	3:25-cv-00027
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Report and recommendation on judicial review of the Commissioner of Social Security's final decision denying disability insurance benefits. The magistrate judge recommended reversal and remand under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews whether the ALJ applied the correct legal standards and whether substantial evidence supports the ALJ's factual findings. The court may not reweigh conflicting evidence, make credibility determinations, or substitute its judgment for that of the agency. Substantial evidence is such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; report and recommendation with no reporter citation or published designation in the source

PARTIES

Marnie W. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated the supportability and consistency of the medical opinions under 20 C.F.R. § 404.1520c.
2. Whether substantial evidence supported the ALJ's residual-functional-capacity assessment.
3. Whether the ALJ adequately evaluated Marnie's subjective symptoms and functional limitations, including her daily activities, under 20 C.F.R. § 404.1529.
4. Whether the Commissioner's denial of disability insurance benefits should be reversed and remanded under sentence four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).

HOLDINGS

1. An ALJ must consider the regulatory factors for medical opinions and must explain how the ALJ considered supportability and consistency, including the medical source's supporting explanations. The ALJ failed to satisfy those requirements when evaluating the opinions of Dr. Scott and Dr. Lanford.
2. An ALJ must consider all relevant evidence bearing on the claimant's symptoms, including daily activities, and must provide legally adequate reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting the claimant's statements. The ALJ failed to do so here.
3. The ALJ's residual-functional-capacity determination was not supported by substantial evidence because the decision did not provide an accurate and logical bridge between the evidence and the conclusions concerning medical opinions and symptoms.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Substantial evidence means “such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.”” (R. 24)

“The ALJ’s actual RFC finding, 20 C.F.R. § 404.1520(e), must “include those [functional] limitations that the ALJ considers credibly established” by relevant evidence in the record.” (R. 25)

“An ALJ may not substitute [her] own lay opinion for a medical expert’s when evaluating the significance of clinical findings.” (R. 26)

“Viewing the cited exam findings “in a vacuum does not evince a logical bridge between the evidence and the ALJ’s conclusion that Dr. [Lanford’s] opinion was inconsistent.”” (R. 26)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Marnie W. alleged disability from cervical and lumbar degenerative disc disease, spinal stenosis, radiculopathy, and chronic neck and back pain. Imaging showed degenerative changes and significant stenosis, while examinations often showed normal gait, strength, sensation, reflexes, and coordination. Treating and examining physicians offered more restrictive functional assessments than the state-agency physicians, including limitations on sitting, standing, walking, lifting, and the need for frequent position changes. The ALJ found Marnie capable of limited light work, but the magistrate judge concluded that the ALJ failed adequately to explain the treatment of the medical opinions and Marnie's reports of severely limited daily activities.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Marnie W. applied for disability insurance benefits alleging disability beginning March 18, 2022, based primarily on cervical and lumbar degenerative disc disease with stenosis, radiculopathy, and chronic pain. An administrative law judge denied benefits on March 6, 2024, finding that she could perform limited light work and could return to past relevant work or perform other work. The claimant sought review in the district court, and the matter was referred to Magistrate Judge Joel C. Hoppe for a report and recommendation. The magistrate judge concluded that the ALJ inadequately evaluated medical-opinion supportability and consistency and failed adequately to consider the claimant's daily activities and symptoms, recommending reversal and sentence-four remand.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The recommendation directed the presiding District Judge to reverse the Commissioner's final decision and remand the matter under the fourth sentence of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) for proper evaluation of the medical opinions, the claimant's symptoms and daily activities, and the residual-functional-capacity determination. The recommendation also advised the ALJ not to infer substantial long-term relief from isolated or fleeting reports of improvement.

CASES CITED

- Hines v. Barnhart, 453 F.3d 559, 561, 565-66 (4th Cir. 2006)
- Hancock v. Astrue, 667 F.3d 470, 472 (4th Cir. 2012)
- Meyer v. Astrue, 662 F.3d 700, 704 (4th Cir. 2011)
- Riley v. Apfel, 88 F. Supp. 2d 572, 576 (W.D. Va. 2000)
- Melkonyan v. Sullivan, 501 U.S. 89, 98-100 (1991)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- Pierce v. Underwood, 487 U.S. 552, 565 (1988)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 102-03 (2019)
- Universal Camera Corp. v. NLRB, 340 U.S. 474, 487-89 (1951)

- Gordon v. Schweiker, 725 F.2d 231, 236 (4th Cir. 1984)
- Johnson v. Barnhart, 434 F.3d 650, 653 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Coffman v. Bowen, 829 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987)
- Heckler v. Campbell, 461 U.S. 458, 460-62 (1983)
- Lewis v. Berryhill, 858 F.3d 858, 861, 865-66, 869 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Mascio v. Colvin, 780 F.3d 632, 635, 639 (4th Cir. 2015)
- Felton-Miller v. Astrue, 459 F. App'x 226, 230-31 (4th Cir. 2011) (per curiam)
- Patterson v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 846 F.3d 656, 659, 662 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Bryant v. Colvin, No. 3:13cv349, 2014 WL 896983, at *1, *12 (E.D. Va. Mar. 6, 2014)
- Monroe v. Colvin, 826 F.3d 176, 179, 188, 190 (4th Cir. 2016)
- Perry v. Colvin, No. 2:15cv1145, 2016 WL 1183155, at *5 (S.D. W. Va. Mar. 28, 2016)
- Oppenheim v. Finch, 495 F.2d 396, 397 (4th Cir. 1974)
- Thomas v. Berryhill, 916 F.3d 307, 311-12 (4th Cir. 2019)
- Arakas v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, 983 F.3d 83, 99, 101, 106, 108 (4th Cir. 2020)
- Shinaberry v. Saul, 952 F.3d 113, 120, 123 (4th Cir. 2020)
- Oakes v. Kijakazi, 70 F.4th 207, 212-15 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Daryl R. v. O'Malley, No. 5:23cv59, 2024 WL 3649033, at *4 n.4 (W.D. Va. Aug. 5, 2024)
- Drumgold v. Commissioner of Social Security, 144 F.4th 596, 605-06 (4th Cir. 2025)
- Stephen R. v. O'Malley, No. 21-2292, 2024 WL 3508155, at *4-5 (4th Cir. July 23, 2024)
- Howard v. Saul, 408 F. Supp. 3d 721, 731 (D.S.C. 2019)
- Farrar v. Astrue, No. 3:11cv457, 2012 WL 3113159, at *10-11 (E.D. Va. July 13, 2012)
- Stacey A. v. Dudek, Civ. No. 24-457, 2025 WL 948295, at *4 (D. Md. Mar. 25, 2025)
- Brown v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 873 F.3d 251, 269-70 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Shelley C. v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 61 F.4th 341, 348, 361 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Woods v. Berryhill, 888 F.3d 686, 694 (4th Cir. 2018)
- Rogers v. Kijakazi, 62 F.4th 872, 878 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Sanders v. Colvin, No. 5:13cv790, 2015 WL 736088, at *9 (E.D.N.C. Feb. 20, 2015)
- Hemminger v. Astrue, 590 F. Supp. 2d 1073, 1081 (W.D. Wis. 2008)
- Tonya D. v. Kijakazi, No. 7:20cv777, 2022 WL 1126623, at *8 (W.D. Va. Feb. 7, 2022)
- Pierce v. Kijakazi, No. 2:20cv53, 2022 WL 495294, at *6 (E.D.N.C. Jan. 14, 2022)
- Donta J. v. Saul, No. 2:20cv131, 2021 WL 2711467, at *4 (E.D. Va. July 1, 2021)
- Owens v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, No. SAG-14-3692, 2015 WL 5052688, at *3 (D. Md. Aug. 24, 2015)
- Nguyen v. Chater, 172 F.3d 31, 35 (1st Cir. 1999)
- Neal v. Astrue, Civ. No. JKS 09-2316, 2010 WL 1759582, at *2 (D. Md. Apr. 29, 2010)
- Golini v. Astrue, No. 2:10cv525, 2011 WL 4409223, at *6 (E.D. Va. Aug. 16, 2011), adopted, 2011 WL 4408789 (E.D. Va. Sept. 2011), aff'd, 483 F. App'x 806 (4th Cir. 2012)

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