

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Christopher Chiyere Alikah v. Commissioner of Social Security

Alikah v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 1:22-cv-01028-CDB (E.D. Cal. May 27, 2025) · No. 1:22-cv-01028-CDB · Decided May 28, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California reviews the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Christopher Chiyere Alikah’s application for disability benefits. The court denies Plaintiff’s motion for summary judgment and grants the Commissioner’s cross-motion, upholding the administrative law judge’s evaluation of Plaintiff’s subjective symptom testimony and residual functional capacity.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Christopher D. Baker
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	May 28, 2025
DOCKET	1:22-cv-01028-CDB
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying disability insurance benefits and Supplemental Security Income. The parties filed cross-motions for summary judgment on the administrative record.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews the Commissioner's decision under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) and will disturb it only if it is unsupported by substantial evidence or based on legal error. The court must consider the entire record, may not substitute its judgment for the Commissioner's, and will uphold an ALJ's conclusion when the evidence is susceptible to more than one rational interpretation. Harmless errors do not warrant reversal.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order with no reported citation
PARTIES	Christopher Chiyere Alikah v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons for discounting Plaintiff's subjective symptom testimony concerning the limiting effects of PTSD and major depressive disorder.
2. Whether substantial evidence supported the Commissioner's final determination that Plaintiff was not disabled.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ properly discounted portions of Plaintiff's subjective symptom testimony because the testimony was inconsistent with the record, including Plaintiff's generally normal mental-status examinations, positive response to conservative treatment, administrative medical findings, and reported daily activities.
2. Substantial evidence supported the ALJ's nondisability determination, and the ALJ's decision was affirmed.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The scope of review under § 405(g) is limited; the Commissioner's decision will be disturbed "only if it is not supported by substantial evidence or is based on legal error."" (Opinion at 2)

"If the first step is met and there is no evidence of malingering, "the ALJ must provide 'specific, clear and convincing reasons for' rejecting the claimant's testimony."" (Opinion at 13)

"The Court finds the ALJ sufficiently explained her reasons for discounting Plaintiff's symptom testimony based on evidence in the record." (Opinion at 16)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning November 1, 2019, based principally on PTSD and major depressive disorder. The ALJ found those impairments severe but concluded that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for work at all exertional levels, limited to simple, repetitive tasks, a routine work environment, and occasional contact with coworkers and the public. The ALJ relied on generally normal mental-status examinations when Plaintiff complied with conservative treatment, administrative medical findings supporting limited work, and daily activities including driving, shopping online, managing finances, and playing video games. The district court upheld the ALJ's evaluation of Plaintiff's subjective symptom testimony and found substantial evidence supported the nondisability determination.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for disability insurance benefits and SSI in May 2020. The claims were denied initially and on reconsideration, and an ALJ issued an unfavorable decision on June 29, 2021. The Appeals Council denied review on June 22, 2022, after which Plaintiff filed this action. The district court denied Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment, granted the Commissioner's cross-motion, affirmed the ALJ's decision, and directed entry of judgment for Defendant.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Hill v. Astrue, 698 F.3d 1153, 1158 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Sandgathe v. Chater, 108 F.3d 978, 980 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Tommasetti v. Astrue, 533 F.3d 1035, 1038-40 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Shinseki v. Sanders, 556 U.S. 396, 409-10 (2009)
- Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1098 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Beltran v. Astrue, 700 F.3d 386, 389 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Keyser v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 648 F.3d 721, 725 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Webb v. Barnhart, 433 F.3d 683, 686 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Smolen v. Chater, 80 F.3d 1273, 1281-82, 1284, 1290 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Andrews v. Shalala, 53 F.3d 1035, 1039 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Orn v. Astrue, 495 F.3d 625, 635 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1112 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Lingenfelter v. Astrue, 504 F.3d 1028, 1036 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Treichler v. Commissioner of Social Security, 775 F.3d 1090, 1102-03 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Carmickle v. Commissioner of Social Security, 533 F.3d 1155, 1160-61 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Moisa v. Barnhart, 367 F.3d 882, 885 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Stewart v. Kijakazi, 2023 WL 4162767, at *5 (E.D. Cal. June 22, 2023)
- Record v. Kijakazi, 2023 WL 2752097, at *4 (E.D. Cal. Mar. 31, 2023)
- Wilson v. Berryhill, 757 Fed. Appx. 595, 597 (9th Cir. 2019)
- Smartt v. Kijakazi, 53 F.4th 489, 494, 499-500 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Bray v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 554 F.3d 1219, 1226 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Bunnell v. Sullivan, 947 F.2d 341, 346 (9th Cir. 1991)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1015 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Moore v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 278 F.3d 920, 924 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Brown-Hunter v. Colvin, 806 F.3d 487, 493 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Vertigan v. Halter, 260 F.3d 1044, 1049 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 680 (9th Cir. 2005)

- Reddick v. Chater, 157 F.3d 715, 722 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Rollins v. Massanari, 261 F.3d 853, 857 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Hairston v. Saul, 827 Fed. Appx. 772, 773 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Guthrie v. Kijakazi, 2022 WL 15761380, at *1 (9th Cir. Oct. 28, 2022)
- Kaufmann v. Kijakazi, 32 F.4th 843, 851 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Mazon v. Commissioner of Social Security, 2023 WL 3177797, at *7 (E.D. Cal. May 1, 2023)
- Carlos v. Commissioner of Social Security, 2023 WL 1868870, at *4 n.7 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 9, 2023)

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