

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

Merry L. v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration

No. 6:24-cv-01600-YY (D. Or. Feb. 20, 2026) · No. 6:24-cv-01600-YY · Decided February 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Oregon reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Merry L.’s application for Disability Insurance Benefits. The court held that the administrative law judge provided legally sufficient reasons for evaluating the claimant’s symptom testimony, medical opinion evidence, and lay witness statements, and that the decision was supported by substantial evidence. The court affirmed the Commissioner’s decision and dismissed the case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Youlee Yim You
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
DECIDED	February 20, 2026
DOCKET	6:24-cv-01600-YY
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying the plaintiff's application for Disability Insurance Benefits.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court must affirm if the Commissioner's decision applies proper legal standards and is supported by substantial evidence. The court must consider evidence supporting and detracting from the administrative decision, may not substitute its judgment where the evidence reasonably supports either outcome, and must uphold the decision when the evidence is susceptible to more than one rational interpretation and the decision is supported by reasonable inferences from the record.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Merry L. v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

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PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting plaintiff's subjective symptom testimony.
2. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated the persuasiveness of the medical opinions of Lindsey King, Ph.D., Byron Elliott, PMHNP, and Rachel Dyer, LPC.
3. Whether the ALJ erred in addressing the lay witness statements from plaintiff's husband and roommate.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting plaintiff's testimony concerning the intensity, persistence, and limiting effects of her symptoms.
2. The ALJ permissibly found Dr. King's opinion unpersuasive because it relied exclusively on plaintiff's self-reports and was inconsistent with normal objective findings and the conservative course of treatment.
3. The ALJ permissibly found Elliott's opinion unpersuasive because the extreme limitations he assessed were unsupported by objective evidence and contradicted by plaintiff's reported activities and treatment records.
4. The ALJ was not required to evaluate Dyer's statements under the regulatory criteria governing medical opinions because the statements did not describe concrete functional limitations or what plaintiff could or could not do in a work environment.
5. Any error in the ALJ's failure to further discuss the lay witness statements was harmless because the statements described limitations similar to those alleged by plaintiff, and the valid reasons for discounting plaintiff's testimony applied equally to the lay testimony.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The reviewing court must affirm the Commissioner's decision if it is based on proper legal standards and the findings are supported by substantial evidence in the record." (Standard of Review)

"the ALJ can reject the claimant's testimony about the severity of . . . symptoms only by offering specific, clear and convincing reasons for doing so." (Discussion I)

"Under these regulations, controlling weight is no longer given to any medical opinion." (Discussion II)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning December 1, 2018, based primarily on anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, and related functional limitations. She testified that she worked only six to eight hours per week as a private tutor, experienced panic attacks and difficulty with social interactions, and required assistance with some daily activities. The administrative record also reflected conservative treatment with medication and therapy, generally normal mental-status examinations, some ability to drive, shop, prepare simple meals, engage in hobbies, and tutor children, and no inpatient or other intensive psychiatric treatment.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Commissioner denied plaintiff's application for Disability Insurance Benefits after applying the Social Security Act's five-step sequential evaluation process. The administrative law judge found that plaintiff had severe mental impairments but retained the residual functional capacity for work with nonexertional limitations and could perform jobs existing in significant numbers in the national economy. Plaintiff sought review in the District of Oregon, challenging the evaluation of her symptom testimony, medical opinions, and lay witness evidence. The court affirmed the Commissioner's decision and dismissed the case.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Lewis v. Astrue, 498 F.3d 909, 911 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1009-10 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Lingenfelter v. Astrue, 504 F.3d 1028, 1035 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Parra v. Astrue, 481 F.3d 742, 746, 751 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Tommasetti v. Astrue, 533 F.3d 1035, 1038 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Lounsbury v. Barnhart, 468 F.3d 1111, 1114 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1098-99 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Smolen v. Chater, 80 F.3d 1273, 1281 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Dodrill v. Shalala, 12 F.3d 915, 918 (9th Cir. 1993)
- Orteza v. Shalala, 50 F.3d 748, 750 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Lambert v. Saul, 980 F.3d 1266, 1277 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 959 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Tammy S. v. Comm'r Soc. Sec. Admin., No. 6:17-cv-01562-HZ, 2018 WL 5924505, at *4 (D. Or. Nov. 10, 2018)
- Reddick v. Chater, 157 F.3d 715, 722 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Smartt v. Kijakazi, 53 F.4th 489, 498, 500 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Warre v. Comm'r Soc. Sec. Admin., 439 F.3d 1001, 1006 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Orn v. Astrue, 495 F.3d 625, 639 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Ahearn v. Saul, 988 F.3d 1111, 1117 (9th Cir. 2021)

- Woods v. Kijakazi, 32 F.4th 785, 791-92 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Nguyen v. Chater, 100 F.3d 1462, 1467 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Valentine v. Commissioner, 574 F.3d 685, 694 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1114, 1117, 1122 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Buck v. Berryhill, 869 F.3d 1040, 1049 (9th Cir. 2017)

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