

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
NORTH CAROLINA

Charles Kurfees v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Kurfees · No. 5:25-CV-00135-KDB · Decided April 9, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina reversed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Charles Kurfees’s application for disability insurance benefits. The court remanded under Sentence Four of 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) because the administrative decision did not adequately address whether Kurfees’s recurring migraines required an absenteeism limitation in his residual functional capacity.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kenneth D. Bell
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina
DECIDED	April 9, 2026
DOCKET	5:25-CV-00135-KDB
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying an application for disability insurance benefits.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews the Commissioner's factual findings for substantial evidence and must affirm when the ALJ applied correct legal standards and the findings are supported by substantial evidence. The court does not reweigh conflicting evidence or substitute its judgment for the ALJ's, but it must ensure that proper legal standards were followed and that the decision permits meaningful judicial review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Charles Kurfees v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

- judicial review of agency action
- agency adjudication
- administrative law

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ adequately considered the frequency and severity of Kurfees's migraines in determining his residual functional capacity.
2. Whether the ALJ was required to make an express finding about whether Kurfees's migraines would cause work absences or explain why an absenteeism limitation was unnecessary.
3. Whether the Commissioner's decision was supported by substantial evidence and applied the correct legal standards.

HOLDINGS

1. An ALJ errs when the record indicates that a claimant's headaches or migraines may cause work absences, but the ALJ neither determines whether the episodes would result in absences nor explains how the residual functional capacity accommodates that limitation.
2. The court must reverse and remand for further proceedings when the ALJ's failure to address a material limitation prevents meaningful judicial review, without deciding whether the claimant is disabled or requires the disputed limitation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Because the ALJ neither resolved this question nor explained why the RFC nonetheless accommodated Kurfees’ migraines (or included an absenteeism limitation), the Court cannot determine whether the RFC is supported by substantial evidence.”

“Without such findings, meaningful judicial review is impossible.”

“To be clear, the Court expresses no opinion as to whether Kurfees should be found disabled, or whether he does or does not require additional limitations to his RFC.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Kurfees alleged disability beginning October 27, 2021, based in part on migraines, post-COVID-19 syndrome, COPD, obesity, and chronic fatigue syndrome. Although treatment reportedly reduced the frequency and severity of his migraines by approximately 50 percent, he continued to experience migraines about once a week. The vocational expert testified that one absence per month or up to 14 percent off-task time would be tolerated in the workplace, but the ALJ did not determine whether Kurfees's migraines would cause absences or explain how the RFC accommodated them.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Kurfees applied for Title II disability insurance benefits, and the claim was denied initially and on reconsideration. After a hearing, the ALJ denied the application on February 28, 2025, and the Appeals Council denied review. On judicial review, the district court concluded that the ALJ did not adequately address whether

Kurfees's migraines would cause work absences or otherwise explain how the residual functional capacity accommodated those limitations.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remanded to the ALJ for a new hearing and additional consideration of whether and how Kurfees's migraines affect his ability to work, including whether they would result in work absences or require an RFC limitation. The ALJ must provide an adequate explanation permitting meaningful judicial review.

CASES CITED

- Drumgold v. Commissioner of Social Security, 144 F.4th 596, 604-05 (4th Cir. 2025)
- Shinaberry v. Saul, 952 F.3d 113, 120, 123 (4th Cir. 2020)
- Pearson v. Colvin, 810 F.3d 204, 207 (4th Cir. 2015)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 98-99, 102-03 (2019)
- Metcalf v. Schweiker, 795 F.2d 343, 345 (4th Cir. 1986)
- Hays v. Sullivan, 907 F.2d 1453, 1456 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Johnson v. Barnhart, 434 F.3d 650, 653 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Hancock v. Astrue, 667 F.3d 470, 472 (4th Cir. 2012)
- Lester v. Schweiker, 683 F.2d 838, 841 (4th Cir. 1982)
- Long v. Kijakazi, No. 1:22-CV-00091-KDB, 2022 WL 18026331, at *2-3 (W.D.N.C. Dec. 30, 2022)
- Woody v. Kijakazi, No. 22-1437, 2023 WL 5745359 (4th Cir. Sept. 6, 2023)
- Patterson v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 846 F.3d 656, 663 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Boing v. Raleigh & G.R. Co., 87 N.C. 360 (N.C. 1882)
- Sedar v. Reston Town Ctr. Prop., LLC, 988 F.3d 756 (4th Cir. 2021)