

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
OKLAHOMA

Justin M. Paquette v. Frank Bisignano

Paquette · No. CIV-24-1201-PRW · Decided December 19, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma adopted Magistrate Judge Suzanne Mitchell’s Report and Recommendation and affirmed the Social Security Administration’s decision denying Justin M. Paquette’s disability claim. The court rejected challenges concerning the evaluation of medical opinions, subjective symptoms, medication refusal, and activities of daily living, concluding that the ALJ’s decision was supported by substantial evidence and was free of harmful legal error.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Patrick R. Wyrick
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma
DECIDED	December 19, 2025
DOCKET	CIV-24-1201-PRW
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Social Security Administration's final decision denying disability benefits. After the magistrate judge issued a Report and Recommendation recommending affirmance, Plaintiff filed objections and the Commissioner responded.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court reviews properly objected-to portions of a magistrate judge's recommendation de novo and unobjected-to portions for clear error. In reviewing the SSA's decision, the court asks whether the administrative law judge's decision is supported by substantial evidence and free of legal error; it may not reweigh the evidence or substitute its judgment for the agency's. Any legal error warrants reversal only if the claimant demonstrates harmful prejudice.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order adopting a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation

PARTIES

Justin M. Paquette v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of the Social Security Administration

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 district court should adopt the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation after reviewing Plaintiff's objections.
2. Whether the ALJ's determination that Plaintiff could interact with coworkers and supervisors was supported by substantial evidence.
3. Whether the ALJ improperly evaluated Plaintiff's subjective mental-impairment symptoms and activities.
4. Whether Plaintiff waived his argument that the ALJ failed to apply the medication-refusal factors identified in *Frey v. Bowen* by raising it for the first time in his objections.

HOLDINGS

1. The district court must review de novo any portion of a magistrate judge's disposition to which a timely and specific objection is made, while unobjected-to portions may be reviewed for clear error.
2. The SSA's decision must be affirmed because the ALJ's residual-functional-capacity determination and finding that Plaintiff was not disabled were supported by substantial evidence, and the court could not reweigh the evidence or substitute its judgment for the agency's.
3. Plaintiff waived his argument that the ALJ failed to apply the factors from *Frey v. Bowen* because he did not raise that argument in his opening brief before the magistrate judge and raised it for the first time in his objections.
4. Reversal was unwarranted because Plaintiff failed to demonstrate that any alleged legal error was harmful.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The Court must "determine de novo any part of the magistrate judge's disposition that has been properly objected to.""

"the opinion of the administrative law judge (the "ALJ") need only be supported by substantial evidence in the record"

"which is "more than a scintilla, but less than a preponderance""

“the Court must “neither reweigh the evidence nor substitute [its] judgment for that of the agency.””

“Issues raised for the first time in objections to the magistrate judge's recommendation are deemed waived.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The administrative law judge determined that Plaintiff Justin M. Paquette was not disabled and could interact appropriately with coworkers and supervisors. The ALJ considered evidence concerning Paquette's bipolar-disorder symptoms, treatment records, medical opinions, subjective reports, medication refusal, and statements reflecting an interest in returning to the workforce through owning a small business and completing a college degree. The district court concluded that the ALJ's residual-functional-capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence and that Paquette had not shown harmful legal error.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Magistrate Judge Suzanne Mitchell issued a Report and Recommendation on July 9, 2025, recommending that the Social Security Administration's decision be affirmed. Plaintiff timely objected, and the Commissioner responded. The district court reviewed the properly objected-to portions de novo, reviewed the unobjected-to portions for clear error, adopted the Report and Recommendation in full, and affirmed the SSA decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- United States v. 2121 E. 30th St., Tulsa, Oklahoma, 73 F.3d 1057, 1060 (10th Cir. 1996)
- Summers v. State of Utah, 927 F.2d 1165, 1167-68 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Marshall v. Chater, 75 F.3d 1421, 1426-27 (10th Cir. 1996)
- Wilson v. Astrue, 602 F.3d 1136, 1140 (10th Cir. 2010)
- Doyal v. Barnhart, 331 F.3d 759, 760 (10th Cir. 2003)
- Lax v. Astrue, 489 F.3d 1080, 1084 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Zoltanski v. F.A.A., 372 F.3d 1195, 1200 (10th Cir. 2004)
- Newbold v. Colvin, 718 F.3d 1257, 1262 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Collins v. Colvin, 640 F. App'x 698, 701 (10th Cir. 2016)
- Shinseki v. Sanders, 556 U.S. 396, 409 (2009)
- Warnell v. O'Malley, 97 F.4th 1050, 1053-54 (7th Cir. 2024)
- Keyes-Zachery v. Astrue, 695 F.3d 1156, 1166-67 (10th Cir. 2012)
- Frey v. Bowen, 816 F.2d 508, 515 (10th Cir. 1987)

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