

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Elizabeth Ann Debilzen v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social
Security

Debilzen · No. 4:24-CV-02095 · Decided March 30, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania affirmed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Elizabeth Ann Debilzen’s claim for supplemental security income. The court held that the administrative law judge’s evaluation of medical opinion evidence, activities of daily living, and residual functional capacity was supported by substantial evidence.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sean A. Camoni
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	March 30, 2026
DOCKET	4:24-CV-02095
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. §§ 405(g) and 1383(c) (3) of the Commissioner's final decision denying supplemental security income benefits. The parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c) and Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 73.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews the Commissioner's factual findings to determine whether they are supported by substantial evidence and reviews legal issues plenary. The court may not reweigh evidence or substitute its judgment for that of the ALJ, and reversal is warranted only when the evidence not only supports a contrary conclusion but compels it. The ALJ must sufficiently articulate the reasons for the decision to permit meaningful judicial review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Elizabeth Ann Debilzen v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

agency adjudication

administrative law

disability definition

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security law

administrative law

disability benefits

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's evaluation of Dr. Campbell's mental-health medical opinion and resulting residual functional capacity were supported by substantial evidence.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on Debilzen's activities of daily living when assessing the severity of her mental impairments and residual functional capacity.
3. Whether the Commissioner's denial of benefits was supported by substantial evidence and based on a correct application of law.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ adequately explained why Dr. Campbell's opinion was unpersuasive, and the residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence.
2. The ALJ reasonably considered Debilzen's activities of daily living, and those activities, considered together with the medical evidence, supported the RFC and the finding of only mild mental limitations.
3. The Commissioner's decision denying benefits was supported by substantial evidence and was affirmed.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Substantial evidence does not mean a large or considerable amount of evidence, but rather “such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.”” (Section II)

“Neither the district court nor [the Third Circuit] is empowered to weigh the evidence or substitute its conclusions for those of the fact-finder.” (Section II)

“To reverse the ALJ’s findings and decision, the Court “must find that the evidence not only supports [a contrary] conclusion but compels it.”” (Section II)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Debilzen applied for supplemental security income, alleging disability based on physical and mental impairments. The ALJ found severe physical and mental impairments but determined that Debilzen retained the residual functional capacity for restricted light work involving simple, routine, repetitive, low-stress tasks with limited social interaction. In evaluating the mental limitations, the ALJ found Dr. Campbell's opinion unpersuasive based on the absence of objective support, conservative treatment, and the lack of intensive

mental-health intervention. The ALJ also considered Debilzen's activities, including personal care, meal preparation, cleaning, shopping, paying bills, watching television, and playing games, and found her not disabled at step five.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Debilzen applied for supplemental security income on May 11, 2021, alleging disability beginning January 1, 2021. The claim was initially denied, and an Administrative Law Judge denied benefits after a hearing. The Appeals Council denied review, making the ALJ's decision the Commissioner's final decision. Debilzen then filed this action, arguing that the ALJ improperly evaluated medical-opinion evidence and her activities of daily living. The district court affirmed the Commissioner's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Williams v. Sullivan, 970 F.2d 1178, 1181-82 (3d Cir. 1992)
- Bowen v. Yuckert, 482 U.S. 137, 146 n.5 (1987)
- Johnson v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 529 F.3d 198, 200 (3d Cir. 2008)
- Ficca v. Astrue, 901 F. Supp. 2d 533, 536 (M.D. Pa. 2012)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 102-03 (2019)
- Pierce v. Underwood, 487 U.S. 552, 565 (1988)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- Mason v. Shalala, 994 F.2d 1058, 1064 (3d Cir. 1993)
- Consolo v. Fed. Mar. Comm'n, 383 U.S. 607, 620 (1966)
- Leslie v. Barnhart, 304 F. Supp. 2d 623, 627 (M.D. Pa. 2003)
- Immigr. & Naturalization Serv. v. Elias-Zacarias, 502 U.S. 478, 481 n.1 (1992)
- Arnold v. Colvin, No. 12-2417, 2014 WL 940205, at *1 (M.D. Pa. Mar. 11, 2014)
- Burton v. Schweiker, 512 F. Supp. 913, 914 (W.D. Pa. 1981)
- Wright v. Sullivan, 900 F.2d 675, 678 (3d Cir. 1990)
- Burnett v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 220 F.3d 112, 119 (3d Cir. 2000)
- Hartranft v. Apfel, 181 F.3d 358, 360 (3d Cir. 1999)
- Cunningham v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 507 F. App'x 111, 118 (3d Cir. 2012)
- Horodenski v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 215 F. App'x 183, 189 n.5 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Gonzales v. Colvin, 191 F. Supp. 3d 401, 424 (M.D. Pa. 2015)