

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
TEXAS, HOUSTON DIVISION

Kimberly R. v. Commissioner of the Social Security Administration

Kimberly R. v. Commissioner of the Social Security Administration · No. 4:24-cv-3226 · Decided December 29,
2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas reviewed the denial of Kimberly R.'s claim for Social Security disability insurance benefits. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge's residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence and properly evaluated the claimant's adapting, managing, and social-interaction limitations, as well as the medical opinions. The court granted the Commissioner's motion for summary judgment, denied the plaintiff's motion, affirmed the Commissioner's decision, and dismissed the case with prejudice.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Richard W. Bennett
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division
DECIDED	December 29, 2025
DOCKET	4:24-cv-3226
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under Title II of the Social Security Act of the Commissioner's final decision denying disability insurance benefits. The parties filed cross-motions for summary judgment, and the parties consented to proceed before a magistrate judge.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews the Commissioner's decision to determine whether it is supported by substantial evidence on the record as a whole and whether the Commissioner applied the proper legal standard. The court may not reweigh the evidence, try the issues de novo, or substitute its judgment for the Commissioner's.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Kimberly R. v. Commissioner of the Social Security Administration

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

agency adjudication

administrative law

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability benefits

administrative law

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity finding adequately accounted for Plaintiff's moderate limitation in adapting or managing oneself.
2. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity finding adequately reflected Plaintiff's social-interaction limitations.
3. Whether the ALJ improperly substituted his own lay opinion for the opinions of state-agency psychological consultants and Plaintiff's treating psychologist.
4. Whether the Commissioner's final decision was supported by substantial evidence and applied the proper legal standards.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ adequately accounted for Plaintiff's moderate limitation in adapting or managing oneself, and the RFC was supported by substantial evidence.
2. The ALJ's limitation to simple, non-production-rate work with occasional interaction with the public, coworkers, and supervisors adequately accommodated Plaintiff's social-interaction limitations.
3. The ALJ did not improperly substitute a lay opinion for medical opinions because the RFC was supported by medical examinations, provider reports, and the totality of the record.
4. The Commissioner's decision was supported by substantial evidence and applied the proper legal standard.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"review of Social Security disability cases 'is limited to two inquiries: (1) whether the decision is supported by substantial evidence on the record as a whole, and (2) whether the Commissioner applied the proper legal standard.'" (3-4)

"Substantial evidence is 'such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept to support a conclusion' and constitutes 'more than a mere scintilla' but 'less than a preponderance' of evidence." (4)

"The substantial evidence standard is not a rubber stamp for the Commissioner's decision and involves more than a search for evidence supporting the Commissioner's findings." (4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning October 11, 2021, and sought disability insurance benefits under Title II of the Social Security Act. The ALJ found severe impairments including morbid obesity, spinal fusion, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, anxiety, and depression, but determined that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for light work with restrictions to simple, non-production-rate work and occasional interaction with others. Although Plaintiff could not perform past relevant work, the ALJ found that jobs existed in significant numbers in the national economy that Plaintiff could perform.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed a claim for disability insurance benefits, which the Social Security Administration denied initially and on reconsideration. After an administrative hearing, the ALJ found Plaintiff not disabled at Step Five. The Appeals Council denied review, making the ALJ's decision the Commissioner's final decision. The district court granted the Commissioner's motion for summary judgment, denied Plaintiff's motion, affirmed the Commissioner's decision, and dismissed the case with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Masterson v. Barnhart, 309 F.3d 267, 271 (5th Cir. 2002)
- Sims v. Apfel, 530 U.S. 103, 106-07 (2000)
- Taylor v. Astrue, 706 F.3d 600, 602-03 (5th Cir. 2013)
- Copeland v. Colvin, 771 F.3d 920, 923 (5th Cir. 2014)
- Perez v. Barnhart, 415 F.3d 457, 461 (5th Cir. 2005)
- Singletary v. Bowen, 798 F.2d 818, 822-23 (5th Cir. 1986)
- Hardman v. Colvin, 820 F.3d 142, 147 (5th Cir. 2016)
- Newton v. Apfel, 209 F.3d 448, 452 (5th Cir. 2000)
- Heck v. Colvin, 674 F. App'x 411, 413, 415 (5th Cir. 2017)
- Brown v. Apfel, 192 F.3d 492, 496 (5th Cir. 1999)
- Johnson v. Colvin, 595 F. App'x 443, 444 (5th Cir. 2015)
- Harrell v. Bowen, 862 F.2d 471, 475 (5th Cir. 1988)
- Gonzales v. Colvin, No. 3:15-cv-0685, 2016 WL 107843, at *9 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 11, 2016)
- Donna A. v. Commissioner of Social Security, No. 5:22-cv-111, 2023 WL 5004867, at *4 (N.D. Tex. July 17, 2023), report and recommendation adopted sub nom. Donna A. v. Kijakazi, 2023 WL 5004073 (N.D. Tex. Aug. 4, 2023)
- Nic R. v. Kijakazi, No. 3:22-cv-00106, 2023 WL 2529930, at *3 (N.D. Tex. Feb. 21, 2023)
- Barrett v. Berryhill, 906 F.3d 340, 343 (5th Cir. 2018)
- Acosta v. Astrue, 865 F. Supp. 2d 767, 790 n.34 (W.D. Tex. 2012)

- Laird v. O'Malley, No. 24-cv-00059, 2025 WL 2492980, at *6 (W.D. Tex. Jan. 17, 2025), report and recommendation adopted sub nom. Laird v. Colvin, 2025 WL 540526 (W.D. Tex. Feb. 15, 2025)
- Audler v. Astrue, 501 F.3d 446, 448-49 (5th Cir. 2007)
- Haywood v. Sullivan, 888 F.2d 1463, 1470 (5th Cir. 1989)
- James v. Bowen, 793 F.2d 702, 706 (5th Cir. 1986)
- Daigle v. Kijakazi, No. 22-30721, 2023 WL 4501865, at *2-*3 (5th Cir. July 12, 2023)
- Webster v. Kijakazi, Webster v. Kijakazi, 19 F.4th 715, 718-19 (5th Cir. 2021)
- Moreira v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, No. 24-cv-00021, 2025 WL 1090895, at *4 (W.D. Tex. Feb. 27, 2025), report and recommendation adopted, 2025 WL 943413 (W.D. Tex. Mar. 28, 2025)
- Mendoza v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, No. 5:24-cv-055, 2025 WL 906225, at *6-*7 (N.D. Tex. Mar. 25, 2025)
- Jones v. Colvin, No. 1:16-cv-271, 2017 WL 3896679, at *3 (S.D. Miss. Sept. 6, 2017)