

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE, GREENEVILLE DIVISION

Billy Gibson v. Commissioner of Social Security

Gibson · No. 2:25-CV-58 · Decided March 6, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee reviews a Social Security disability determination under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g). The court concludes that substantial evidence supported the ALJ’s formulation of the claimant’s residual functional capacity and finding that he could perform medium work, and it denies relief and affirms the ALJ’s decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, Greeneville Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cynthia Richardson Wyrick
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, Greeneville Division
DECIDED	March 6, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-CV-58
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying Social Security disability benefits. The parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed whether the ALJ applied the correct legal standards and whether substantial evidence supported the factual findings and residual functional capacity determination. Under the substantial-evidence standard, the ALJ's decision falls within a permissible zone of choice even if the record could also support a contrary conclusion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished, nonprecedential district-court opinion
PARTIES	Billy Gibson v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

administrative law

agency adjudication

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether substantial evidence supported the ALJ's residual functional capacity determination that Gibson could perform medium-exertion work.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly evaluated Gibson's subjective symptom reports under Social Security Ruling 16-3p.
3. Whether the ALJ adequately explained the evidentiary basis for the residual functional capacity determination and built a logical bridge between the evidence and the conclusion.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ had sufficient evidence in the record to formulate Gibson's residual functional capacity and make the disability determination.
2. Substantial evidence supported the ALJ's determination that Gibson retained the ability to perform medium-exertion work.
3. The ALJ properly evaluated Gibson's reported symptoms under Social Security Ruling 16-3p and reasonably found that the symptoms were less limiting than alleged because Gibson's statements were inconsistent with the overall record.
4. The ALJ adequately acknowledged evidence that could support a more restrictive exertional limitation and explained why other evidence supported the conclusion that Gibson could perform medium work.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“He does still feel pretty tired, especially after working all day.” (Tr. 426)

“does report he works outside- mowing lawns....” (Tr. 435)

“During that appointment, Claimant also denied headaches, visual changes, dizziness, shortness of breath and extremity numbness and weakness.” (Tr. 434)

“does find [the gabapentin] to be effective for his pain.” (Tr. 348)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Gibson alleged that physical and mental impairments limited his ability to work, including his ability to bend, stand, and perform activities without dizziness or shortness of breath. The ALJ found that Gibson retained the capacity for medium-exertion work. The district court relied on medical records showing that Gibson reported working all day, mowing lawns outdoors, denied several symptoms, and found gabapentin effective in controlling his pain without significant side effects.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Gibson filed this action on April 9, 2025, challenging the ALJ's residual functional capacity determination and finding that he could perform medium-exertion work. After briefing, a video hearing was held on March 5, 2026. The court denied the requested relief and affirmed the ALJ's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Blakely v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 581 F.3d 399, 405 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Wright-Hines v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 597 F.3d 392, 395 (6th Cir. 2010)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
GREENEVILLE DIVISION) BILLY GIBSON,)) Plaintiff,)) v.) CASE NO. 2:25-CV-58)
COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL SECURITY,)) Defendant.))) OPINION AND ORDER On
April 9, 2025, Plaintiff brought this action under 42 U.S.C. §§ 405(g) for review of the final
decision of the Commissioner of Social Security.

[Doc. 4]. Upon consent of the parties pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), this Court has jurisdiction over this matter through entry of final judgment. [Doc. 12]. Claimant filed Appellant's Brief [Doc. 13] on July 8, 2025, in which he asserts that the Administrative Law Judge ("ALJ") did not account for the total limiting effects of his impairments. *Id.* Specifically, Claimant takes issue with the ALJ's finding that he can perform the arduous physical demands of medium work on a regular and continuous basis.

More specifically, Claimant asserts that the ALJ had insufficient evidence in the record to formulate his RFC, that the ALJ improperly discounted his reported symptoms, gave improper weight to certain information contained within Claimant's medical records, and failed to build a logical bridge between his analysis of the evidence of record and his determination that Claimant retained the ability to perform medium exertion work.

On September 17, 2025, the Commissioner filed a response [Doc. 17], arguing that there was sufficient evidence in Claimant's record from which the ALJ could formulate Claimant's RFC and render a decision. Further, the Commissioner argued that the ALJ's decision to reduce Claimant's ability to perform work to only the medium level of exertion was supported by substantial evidence.

Shortly thereafter, Claimant filed a Reply [Doc. 18], in which he emphasized that there were abnormal findings in his medical records, to which the ALJ cited in his decision. Claimant

contends that the ALJ used “the most nefarious interpretation of evidence that is simply vague” in rendering his decision. [Doc., 18, p.3]. Claimant further emphasizes his contention that the ALJ did not adequately explain his determination that Claimant retained the ability to perform medium work given Claimant’s own symptoms complaints when combined with the record medical evidence.

The Court then conducted a hearing in this matter by video on March 5, 2026, during which the Court addressed the parties’ briefs. During the hearing, Karl E. Osterhout, Esq., appeared and offered argument for Claimant and Sarah Preston, Esq. appeared and offered argument for the Commissioner. Following oral argument, the Court set forth the standard of review on the record, including the law applicable to each of its findings, and issued its ruling from the bench.

After considering the parties’ filings, the oral arguments offered by their counsel, and the record in this matter, and for all of the reasons stated on the record by the Court, which are hereby incorporated by reference as though fully restated herein, the Court finds that the ALJ had sufficient evidence in the record from which to formulate Claimant’s RFC.

While the state agency reviewers had opined that they did not have sufficient evidence to adequately assess Claimant’s disability claim, both noted that this was primarily the result of Claimant’s failure to provide requested information. Tr. 58, 67. Further, by the time the ALJ issued his ruling he had additional medical records and Claimant’s own testimony on which to base his RFC formulation and disability determination.

The Court further finds that substantial evidence supports the ALJ’s determination that Claimant maintained the ability to perform medium exertion work. While the Court notes that Claimant has physical and mental health conditions that are documented by his medical records, the ALJ’s decision demonstrates that he considered the objective evidence of those conditions contained within Claimant’s medical records, as well as Claimant’s own statements to his medical providers about those conditions, and used that information to then place into context Claimant’s hearing testimony regarding his symptoms.

The Court specifically finds that the ALJ did not take the most “nefarious” view of the information contained in Claimant’s medical records nor did the ALJ improperly discount Claimant’s own symptom reports. Instead, the ALJ properly considered Claimant’s reports of symptoms under SSR 16-3P and was entitled to find that Claimant’s symptoms were less likely to reduce his capacity to perform work-related activities because his statements were inconsistent with the overall record evidence.

For example, Claimant testified during his January 9, 2024 hearing before the ALJ that he could not bend over at all, could stand for only 15 minutes without a break, and regularly experienced dizziness and shortness of breath. Tr. 38-39.

In contrast, on April 19, 2023, Claimant advised one of his treatment providers that “[h]e does still feel pretty tired, especially after working all day.” Id. at 426 (emphasis added). Then on June 29, 2023, Claimant’s treatment records reflect that “[he] does report he works outside- mowing lawns....” Id. at 435 (emphasis added). During that appointment, Claimant also denied headaches, visual changes, dizziness, shortness of breath and extremity numbness and weakness.

Id. at 434. These entries in Claimant’s medical records demonstrated that he was not only working, but engaging in physical work outdoors, presented a stark contrast to Claimant’s hearing testimony regarding his symptoms. Claimant also emphasizes points in his medical records where his dose of gabapentin was significantly increased following Claimant’s complaints of significant pain.

However, on July 18, 2022, Claimant’s treatment records reflect that his pain had improved and was controlled by this medication, and that Claimant was experiencing no side effects. Id. at 348. The record further advises that Claimant “does find [the gabapentin] to be effective for his pain.” Id. The same observations appear in Claimant’s medical record from his June 29, 2023 visit with his treatment providers.

Given these findings and observations made by Claimant’s medical providers as to the effectiveness of Claimant’s gabapentin in addressing his pain and the lack of side effects, based upon Claimant’s own reports to them, substantial evidence supported the ALJ’s conclusion that Claimant’s medication was effective in addressing his pain without significant side effects.

Pursuant to SSR 16-3P, the ALJ was entitled to consider the inconsistencies between the symptoms Claimant testified to in his hearing and the statements contained in the medical evidence of record in determining that Claimant’s ability to perform work was not as limited as Claimant suggested.

Finally, the Court finds that the ALJ acknowledged the findings in Claimant’s medical records that might have weighed in favor of finding that Claimant could perform work at a level less than medium exertion, however, he then explained how other findings in the record supported the conclusion that Claimant could perform this level of work. Tr. 19, 23.

For instance, the ALJ observed that despite Claimant experiencing some spine tenderness, his extremities and musculature were normal, he was not experiencing extremity numbness or weakness, his deep tendon reflexes in his lower extremities were normal as was his strength, and while he had been observed to have an antalgic gait once back in 2017, current evidence demonstrated no antalgic gait or limp.

Id. at 23. In summary, the Court finds that substantial evidence supported the ALJ’s factual findings and that he conformed to the relevant legal standards. 42 U.S.C. § 405; *Blakely v. Comm’r of Soc. Sec.*, 581 F.3d 399, 405 (6th Cir. 2009). Additionally, even if the record evidence could have supported a finding that Claimant was limited to light exertion work, the ALJ was

acting within his zone of choice in determining that Claimant retained the ability to perform medium exertion work.

Wright-Hines v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 597 F.3d 392, 395 (6th Cir. 2010) (citing Blakely, 581 F.3d at 405). Accordingly, for the reasons stated above, the Court DENIES the relief requested in Claimant's Complaint, Brief, and Reply [Docs. 4, 13, & 18], and AFFIRMS the decision of the ALJ. SO ORDERED: /s/Cynthia Richardson Wyrick United States Magistrate Judge