

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
NEW YORK

Alexa Jean M. v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 5:25-CV-00158 (PJE) (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 20, 2026) · No. 5:25-CV-00158 (PJE) · Decided March 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of New York reviewed the Commissioner of Social Security's denial of Alexa Jean M.'s application for disability insurance benefits. The court held that the administrative law judge applied the proper legal standards and supported the decision with substantial evidence, including the findings concerning the plaintiff's work activity, alleged accommodations, medical opinions, and residual functional capacity. The court affirmed the Commissioner's decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Paul J. Evangelista
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
DECIDED	March 20, 2026
DOCKET	5:25-CV-00158 (PJE)
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Action under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) seeking review of the Commissioner's denial of disability insurance benefits. Plaintiff moved for judgment on the pleadings and remand; the Commissioner cross-moved for judgment on the pleadings and affirmance.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews the Commissioner's decision to determine whether the correct legal standards were applied and whether the decision is supported by substantial evidence. The court may not conduct a de novo disability determination and must uphold the decision when it is supported by substantial evidence even if the evidence permits more than one rational interpretation.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Alexa Jean M. v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ properly determined that plaintiff's work as a teacher's aide constituted substantial gainful activity rather than work performed under special conditions.
2. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated the persuasiveness of the medical opinions concerning plaintiff's absenteeism, time off task, concentration, persistence, and pace.
3. Whether the residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's finding that plaintiff's teacher's-aide work constituted substantial gainful activity was supported by substantial evidence. Plaintiff did not establish that the work was performed under special conditions within the meaning of 20 C.F.R. § 404.1573(c).
2. The ALJ's persuasiveness analysis was supported by substantial evidence. The ALJ reasonably declined to adopt opinions predicting disabling absenteeism and time off task because those conclusions were unsupported by documented observations or formal testing, inconsistent with treatment records and other evidence, and in some instances internally inconsistent with the providers' own assessments.
3. The RFC was supported by substantial evidence, and no additional limitations for off-task time or absenteeism were required.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Perform a full range of work at all exertional levels, but with the following non-exertional limitations: she can perform simple work at a consistent, goal-oriented pace, but not at a fast, production-rate pace, such as would be experienced in assembly line type of work; she cannot interact with the public or work around crowds of people; and she can make simple decisions and tolerate work changes.” (T at 1181)

“The Court's review of the record supports these conclusions by the ALJ regarding Plaintiff's mental limitations and indicates that Plaintiff has not established further limitations regarding off-task time . . . or attendance than those included by the ALJ in the RFC.” (opinion at 33)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning June 27, 2019, based primarily on depression, anxiety, PTSD, and mixed bipolar disorder. The ALJ found severe impairments of bipolar disorder, ADHD, and an eating disorder, but determined that plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for all exertional levels with restrictions to simple, goal-oriented, non-production-pace work, limited social interaction, simple decisions, and occasional work changes. Plaintiff worked as a teacher's aide from September 2021 through March 2023, earning above substantial-gainful-activity thresholds, and argued that frequent absences and employer flexibility showed that

the work was performed under special conditions. The court concluded that the record did not establish special conditions and that the ALJ's evaluation of the medical opinions and RFC was supported by substantial evidence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed for disability insurance benefits in July 2019. The SSA denied the claim initially and on reconsideration; an ALJ issued an unfavorable decision in June 2021, and the Appeals Council denied review. Plaintiff previously sought judicial review, and the court remanded for further administrative proceedings. After remand by the Appeals Council, the ALJ issued a second unfavorable decision on December 5, 2024. Plaintiff commenced this action in February 2025, and the court affirmed the Commissioner's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *Wagner v. Secretary of Health & Human Services*, 906 F.2d 856, 860 (2d Cir. 1990)
- *Johnson v. Bowen*, 817 F.2d 983, 985-86 (2d Cir. 1987)
- *Halloran v. Barnhart*, 362 F.3d 28, 31 (2d Cir. 2004)
- *Richardson v. Perales*, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- *Brault v. Social Security Administration, Commissioner*, 683 F.3d 443, 448 (2d Cir. 2012)
- *Clark v. Commissioner of Social Security*, 143 F.3d 115, 118 (2d Cir. 1998)
- *Martone v. Apfel*, 70 F. Supp. 2d 145, 148, 150 (N.D.N.Y. 1999)
- *Schillo v. Kijakazi*, 31 F.4th 64, 74, 78 (2d Cir. 2022)
- *McIntyre v. Colvin*, 758 F.3d 146, 149 (2d Cir. 2014)
- *Berry v. Schweiker*, 675 F.2d 464, 467 (2d Cir. 1982)
- *Barnhart v. Thomas*, 540 U.S. 20, 24 (2003)
- *DeChirico v. Callahan*, 134 F.3d 1177, 1180 (2d Cir. 1998)
- *Croce v. Acting Commissioner of Social Security*, 2018 WL 4636815, at *5-*6 (E.D.N.Y. Sept. 27, 2018)
- *Dyer v. Colvin*, 2015 WL 1458511, at *13 (W.D.N.Y. Mar. 30, 2015)
- *Campbell v. Berryhill*, 2019 WL 2436597, at *2-*3 (E.D.N.Y. June 10, 2019), *aff'd sub nom. Campbell v. Saul*, 805 F. App'x 23 (2d Cir. 2020)
- *Rogers v. Colvin*, 2016 WL 4626572, at *16 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 6, 2016)
- *Figueroa-Plumey v. Astrue*, 764 F. Supp. 2d 646, 652 (S.D.N.Y. 2011)
- *Carbee v. Commissioner of Social Security*, 2018 WL 33516, at *8 (N.D.N.Y. Jan. 3, 2018)
- *Johnson v. Commissioner of Social Security*, 2017 WL 1166348, at *3 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 28, 2017)
- *Byrd v. Astrue*, 2013 WL 4459040, at *11 (E.D.N.Y. Aug. 16, 2013)
- *Lenczewski, ex rel. Lenczewski v. Astrue*, 2010 WL 2472548, at *6 (W.D.N.Y. June 15, 2010)
- *Reynard v. Colvin*, 220 F. Supp. 3d 529, 540 (D. Vt. 2016)

- Davila-Marrero v. Apfel, 4 F. App'x 45, 46 (2d Cir. 2001)
- Alston v. Sullivan, 904 F.2d 122, 126 (2d Cir. 1990)
- Juliana Jolean A. v. Kijakazi, 2022 WL 595361, at *11 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 28, 2022)
- Samantha B. v. Kijakazi, 2021 WL 4288442, at *12 (N.D.N.Y. Sept. 21, 2021)
- Renalda R. v. Commissioner of Social Security, 2021 WL 4458821, at *11 (N.D.N.Y. Sept. 29, 2021)
- Melisa G. v. Berryhill, 2019 WL 2502726, at *5 (N.D.N.Y. June 17, 2019)
- Kuhaneck v. Commissioner, 357 F. Supp. 3d 241, 247 (W.D.N.Y. 2019)
- Timothy Todd S. v. Commissioner of Social Security, 2026 WL 738869, at *9 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 26, 2026)
- Lenita B. v. Commissioner of Social Security, 2021 WL 4197817, at *6 (W.D.N.Y. Sept. 15, 2021)

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