

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

Robert E.W., Jr. v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 23-CV-556-A (W.D.N.Y. Feb. 17, 2026) · No. 23-CV-556-A · Decided February 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of New York reviewed the denial of Robert E.W., Jr.’s application for disability insurance benefits. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge’s residual functional capacity assessment was supported by substantial evidence and that the ALJ did not fail to develop the record concerning an alleged hearing impairment; Plaintiff’s motion was denied and the Commissioner’s motion was granted.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of New York
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Richard J. Arcara
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of New York
DECIDED	February 17, 2026
DOCKET	23-CV-556-A
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Action under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) seeking review of the denial of disability insurance benefits; the parties filed cross-motions for judgment on the pleadings.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court reviews whether the Commissioner's conclusions are supported by substantial evidence and based on the correct legal standard. The Commissioner's factual findings are conclusive when supported by substantial evidence, and the court may reject them only when a reasonable factfinder would have to conclude otherwise.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Robert E.W., Jr. v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

- judicial review of agency action
- administrative law
- agency adjudication
- disability definition

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's highly specific residual functional capacity limitations were supported by substantial evidence and properly tethered to the administrative record.
2. Whether the ALJ failed to develop the administrative record concerning Plaintiff's alleged hearing impairment.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence. The ALJ could formulate specific handling, fingering, and visual-acuity restrictions from the record as a whole, including Plaintiff's testimony, treatment records, and medical opinion evidence, even though no single medical opinion mirrored the precise restrictions.
2. The ALJ did not fail to develop the record because the agency made reasonable efforts to obtain relevant records, the record contained evidence addressing Plaintiff's hearing, and Plaintiff did not allege hearing-related functional limitations during the administrative proceedings.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The issue is not whether substantial evidence supports the claimant's argument, but “whether substantial evidence supports the ALJ's decision.”” (IV.A)

“Because the ALJ was “entitled to weigh all of the evidence available to make an RFC finding that was consistent with the record as a whole,” Matta v. Astrue, 508 F. App'x at 56, and because the ALJ did just that, the ALJ's RFC determination was supported by substantial evidence, and this Court will not second guess it.” (V.A)

“where there are no obvious gaps in the administrative record, and where the ALJ already possesses a ‘complete medical history,’ the ALJ is under no obligation to seek additional information” (V.B)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Robert E.W., Jr. sought disability insurance benefits based primarily on retinal artery occlusion and vision problems, Raynaud's Phenomenon, diabetes, and chronic lymphocytic leukemia in remission. The ALJ found severe impairments involving the left-eye retinal artery occlusion, hypertensive retinopathy, posterior vitreous detachment, and leukemia lymphoma in remission, but determined that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for a restricted range of light work. Plaintiff also alleged hearing difficulties, but the administrative record contained no documented functional hearing limitation, and examinations generally showed intact or normal hearing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for Title II disability insurance benefits, alleging disability beginning March 17, 2020. The claim was denied initially and on reconsideration, and an administrative law judge issued an unfavorable decision after a hearing. The Appeals Council denied review on April 20, 2023. Plaintiff then filed this action, and the district court denied Plaintiff's motion, granted the Commissioner's motion, and dismissed the complaint with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Bowen v. City of N.Y., 476 U.S. 467, 470-71
- Talavera v. Astrue, 697 F.3d 145, 151
- Rutherford v. Schweiker, 685 F.2d 60, 62
- Bonet ex rel. T.B. v. Colvin, 523 Fed.Appx. 58, 58-59
- Brault v. Social Sec. Admin., Comm'r, 683 F.3d 443, 448
- Tiffany L. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 1:20-CV-0677 (WBC), 2021 WL 3145694, at *4
- Cook v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 818 F. App'x 108, 109-10
- Jennifer O. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 1:20-CV-1474 (WBC), 2022 WL 2718510, at *4
- Rubin v. Martin O'Malley, Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 116 F.4th 145, 155
- Emmett K. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 23-CV-6036-FPG, 2024 WL 445504, at *2
- Matta v. Astrue, 508 F. App'x 53, 56
- Alexander P. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 24-CV-145-FPG, 2025 WL 2978772, at *2
- Wouters v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 19-CV-610, 2020 WL 2213896, at *2
- Salinovich v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec. Admin., 783 F. App'x 67, 68-69
- Larson v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 2020 WL 5018331, at *11
- Francisco v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 13CV1486 TPG DF, 2015 WL 5316353, at *11
- Rosa v. Callahan, 168 F.3d 72, 79 n. 5
- Perez v. Chater, 77 F.3d 41, 48
- Sampson v. Saul, No. 19CIV6270PAESN, 2020 WL 6130568, at *6