

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Angela Lee v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Lee · No. 1:25-cv-0161-SKO · Decided August 13, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California reviewed the denial of Angela Lee’s application for Social Security disability benefits. The court held that the Administrative Law Judge provided sufficient reasons for evaluating Lee’s subjective symptom testimony and properly evaluated the medical opinion of Dr. Faurbo, and therefore upheld the Commissioner’s decision.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sheila K. Oberto
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 13, 2025
DOCKET	1:25-cv-0161-SKO
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying her application for disability insurance benefits and supplemental security income. The parties submitted briefs without oral argument.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court may set aside the Commissioner's denial of benefits only if the ALJ's findings are based on legal error or are not supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole. Substantial evidence is more than a mere scintilla and means such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. The court must uphold an ALJ's reasonable interpretation of the evidence when the evidence is susceptible to more than one rational interpretation, subject to harmless-error review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Angela Lee v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting Plaintiff's testimony concerning the intensity, persistence, and limiting effects of her symptoms.
2. Whether the ALJ properly evaluated and discounted Dr. Faurbo's medical opinion under 20 C.F.R. § 404.1520c.
3. Whether any error in the ALJ's failure to link normal mental-health and cognitive findings to specific portions of Plaintiff's testimony was harmful.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ properly discounted Plaintiff's testimony concerning the extent of her limitations because the ALJ identified clear and convincing reasons, including Plaintiff's daily activities and improvement with treatment, that were supported by substantial evidence.
2. The ALJ erred by failing to link the normal mental-health and cognitive findings to specific portions of Plaintiff's testimony, but the error was harmless.
3. The ALJ properly evaluated Dr. Faurbo's opinion under the revised Social Security regulations because the ALJ addressed its supportability and consistency and supported the conclusion with substantial evidence.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"This is a highly deferential standard of review." (Opinion at III.B)

"If the claimant meets the first test and there is no evidence of malingering, the ALJ can only reject the claimant's testimony about the severity of the symptoms if they give 'specific, clear and convincing reasons' for the rejection." (Opinion at IV.A.1)

"Accordingly, under the new regulations, 'the decision to discredit any medical opinion, must simply be supported by substantial evidence.'" (Opinion at IV.B.1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Angela Lee alleged disability beginning May 7, 2021, based principally on depression, anxiety, cognitive and learning problems, memory problems, and low vision. She had a GED and no past relevant work. Medical records documented generally normal cognition, insight, judgment, intelligence, attention, and concentration, and reflected improvement or stability with medication. She also reported activities including cooking, using a computer and telephone, reading, and using public transportation.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Commissioner denied Plaintiff's applications initially and on reconsideration. After two administrative hearings, an ALJ found Plaintiff not disabled under the Social Security Act because she could perform work existing in significant numbers in the national economy. The Appeals Council denied review on September 4, 2024, making the ALJ's decision final. The district court affirmed the Commissioner's decision and directed entry of judgment for Defendant.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1097-98 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 679 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Swenson v. Sullivan, 876 F.2d 683, 687 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Biestek v. Berryhill, 587 U.S. 97, 103 (2019)
- Consolidated Edison Co. v. NLRB, 305 U.S. 197, 229 (1938)
- Ford v. Saul, 950 F.3d 1141, 1154 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Valentine v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 574 F.3d 685, 690 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Tommasetti v. Astrue, 533 F.3d 1035, 1038-39 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Edlund v. Massanari, 253 F.3d 1152, 1156 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Sousa v. Callahan, 143 F.3d 1240, 1243 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Penny v. Sullivan, 2 F.3d 953, 956 (9th Cir. 1993)
- Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1111-13 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Stout v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, 454 F.3d 1050, 1055-56 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Shinseki v. Sanders, 556 U.S. 396, 409 (2009)
- Vasquez v. Astrue, 572 F.3d 586, 591 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Lingenfelter v. Astrue, 504 F.3d 1028, 1036 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Bray v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 554 F.3d 1219, 1226-27 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Light v. Social Security Administration, 119 F.3d 789, 792 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Garrison v. Colvin, 759 F.3d 995, 1015, 1017 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Moore v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 278 F.3d 920, 924 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Burrell v. Colvin, 775 F.3d 1133, 1138 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Lester v. Chater, 81 F.3d 821, 834 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Stubbs-Danielson v. Astrue, 539 F.3d 1169, 1175 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Morgan v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 169 F.3d 595, 599-600 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Kelly v. Astrue, 471 F. App'x 674, 677 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Nelson v. Colvin, No. 1:15-cv-00696-SKO, 2016 WL 3407627, at *20 (E.D. Cal. June 20, 2016)
- Bunnell v. Sullivan, 947 F.2d 341, 346 (9th Cir. 1991)

- Rollins v. Massanari, 261 F.3d 853, 857 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Odle v. Heckler, 707 F.2d 439, 440 (9th Cir. 1983)
- Brown-Hunter v. Colvin, 806 F.3d 487, 493-94 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Carmickle v. Commissioner, 533 F.3d 1155, 1162 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Tonapetyan v. Halter, 242 F.3d 1144, 1148 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Woods v. Kijakazi, 32 F.4th 785, 787, 791-92 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Murray v. Heckler, 722 F.2d 499, 501-02 (9th Cir. 1983)
- Batson v. Commissioner of Social Security Administration, 359 F.3d 1190, 1198 (9th Cir. 2004)

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