

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Jennie C. v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

Jennie C. v. Bisignano, Case No. 25-cv-02632-DMR (N.D. Cal. Dec. 30, 2025) · No. 25-cv-02632-DMR · Decided December 30, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California denied Plaintiff Jennie C.’s motion for summary judgment and granted the Commissioner of Social Security’s cross-motion. The court upheld the Administrative Law Judge’s determination that Plaintiff was not disabled from January 31, 2015 through January 23, 2019, while finding that she became disabled on January 24, 2019. The court concluded that the ALJ properly evaluated the treating physician’s opinions and Plaintiff’s subjective symptom testimony.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Donna M. Ryu
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	December 30, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-02632-DMR
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final administrative decision denying Supplemental Security Income benefits for the period from January 31, 2015, through January 23, 2019. The parties filed cross-motions for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court may set aside the Commissioner's decision when the ALJ's findings are based on legal error or are not supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole. If the evidence reasonably supports two conclusions, the court may not substitute its judgment for the Commissioner's. Harmless error does not warrant reversal when it is inconsequential to the ultimate nondisability determination.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court order; nonprecedential

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ provided legally sufficient reasons supported by substantial evidence for assigning little weight to treating physician Dr. Posada's medical opinions.
2. Whether the ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons supported by substantial evidence for discounting Plaintiff's subjective symptom testimony.
3. Whether the ALJ erred by posing incomplete hypothetical questions to the vocational expert.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ did not err in assigning little weight to Dr. Posada's opinions because the opinions lacked adequate support and were inconsistent with the medical evidence and record as a whole.
2. The ALJ did not err in discounting Plaintiff's subjective testimony because the ALJ provided specific, clear, and convincing reasons supported by substantial evidence, including inconsistencies between the testimony and medical evidence, inconsistent symptom reports, and poor effort during examinations.
3. The ALJ did not err by failing to include in the vocational-expert hypotheticals limitations drawn from Dr. Posada's opinions and Plaintiff's testimony because the ALJ properly discounted both sources.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"This court may set aside the Commissioner's denial of disability insurance benefits when the ALJ's findings are based on legal error or are not supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole." (at 5)

"Absent affirmative evidence that the claimant is malingering, the ALJ must provide "specific, clear and convincing" reasons for rejecting the claimant's testimony." (at 12)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability beginning January 31, 2015, based on multiple physical and mental conditions, including spinal disorders, carpal tunnel syndrome, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pain, and related symptoms. Treating physician Dr. Juan Posada issued highly restrictive functional assessments in 2017, but the ALJ found those opinions unsupported and inconsistent with imaging, examinations, gait findings, and other medical evidence. Plaintiff also testified to severe limitations and daily cane use, while the record contained repeated normal or steady gait findings, inconsistent symptom reports, and observations of poor effort. The ALJ determined that Plaintiff could perform light work with specified postural and environmental restrictions and could perform other jobs before January 24, 2019.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for SSI benefits in 2015. An ALJ denied the application in 2018, and the district court affirmed. After Plaintiff appealed, the Ninth Circuit granted a joint motion to vacate and remand for proceedings consistent with *Carr v. Saul* concerning the Appointments Clause. The district court remanded to the agency, the Appeals Council ordered a new hearing before a different ALJ, and the new ALJ again found Plaintiff not disabled before January 24, 2019. After the Appeals Council denied review, Plaintiff filed this action. The court denied Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment and granted the Commissioner's cross-motion.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- *Contreras v. Berryhill*, Case No. 19-cv-00305-DMR
- *Contreras v. Kijakazi*, Case No. 20-16300
- *Carr v. Saul*, 141 S. Ct. 1352 (2021)
- *Tackett v. Apfel*, 180 F.3d 1094, 1097 (9th Cir. 1999)
- *Richardson v. Perales*, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- *Robbins v. Social Security Administration*, 466 F.3d 880, 882 (9th Cir. 2006)
- *Jamerson v. Chater*, 112 F.3d 1064, 1066 (9th Cir. 1997)
- *Tommasetti v. Astrue*, 533 F.3d 1035, 1038 (9th Cir. 2008)
- *Cross v. O'Malley*, 89 F.4th 1211, 1214 (9th Cir. 2024)
- *Woods v. Kijakazi*, 32 F.4th 785, 789 (9th Cir. 2022)
- *Lester v. Chater*, 81 F.3d 821, 830-31 (9th Cir. 1995), as amended (Apr. 9, 1996)
- *Ford v. Saul*, 950 F.3d 1141, 1155 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Reddick v. Chater*, 157 F.3d 715, 725 (9th Cir. 1998)
- *McAllister v. Sullivan*, 888 F.2d 599, 602 (9th Cir. 1989)
- *Pitzer v. Sullivan*, 908 F.2d 502, 506 n.4 (9th Cir. 1990)
- *Gallant v. Heckler*, 753 F.2d 1450, 1456 (9th Cir. 1984)
- *Tonapetyan v. Halter*, 242 F.3d 1144, 1149 (9th Cir. 2001)
- *Magallanes v. Bowen*, 881 F.2d 747, 751-55 (9th Cir. 1989)
- *Allen v. Secretary of Health & Human Services*, 726 F.2d 1470, 1473 (9th Cir. 1984)
- *Fair v. Bowen*, 885 F.2d 597, 603 (9th Cir. 1989)
- *Greger v. Barnhart*, 464 F.3d 968, 972 (9th Cir. 2006)
- *Thomas v. Barnhart*, 278 F.3d 947, 958-59 (9th Cir. 2002)
- *Smolen v. Chater*, 80 F.3d 1273, 1281-84 (9th Cir. 1996)
- *Bunnell v. Sullivan*, 947 F.2d 341, 345 (9th Cir. 1991) (en banc)
- *Vasquez v. Astrue*, 572 F.3d 586, 591 (9th Cir. 2009)

- Burrell v. Colvin, 775 F.3d 1133, 1136 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 681 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Carmickle v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, 533 F.3d 1155, 1161 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Gracy B. v. Kijakazi, No. 20-CV-01241-SP, 2022 WL 971336, at *6 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 30, 2022)
- Collins v. Astrue, No. CV07-08082OP, 2009 WL 1202891, at *5-6 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 27, 2009)

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