

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
NEW YORK

Richard H., II v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 6:24-CV-1146 (PJE) (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 18, 2026) · No. 6:24-CV-1146 (PJE) · Decided March 18, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of New York affirmed the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of disability insurance benefits for the period before August 19, 2021, while recognizing that the plaintiff became disabled on that date. The court held that the administrative law judge’s residual functional capacity determination was supported by substantial evidence and that any failure to expressly address bending, stooping, or temporary back-brace use was harmless.

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 18, 2026
DOCKET	6:24-CV-1146 (PJE)
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff sought review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying his application for disability insurance benefits. The parties filed cross-motions for judgment on the pleadings, and the parties consented to direct review by a magistrate judge.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district 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 determine de novo whether the claimant is disabled or reweigh the evidence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum decision; persuasive rather than binding outside the case
PARTIES	Richard H., II v. Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

judicial review of agency action

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PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security disability benefits

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ's residual functional capacity finding for the period before August 19, 2021, was unsupported by substantial evidence because it did not expressly include limitations on bending or stooping.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly applied the Medical-Vocational Guidelines directly rather than using them as a framework under Social Security Ruling 96-9p.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ's finding that plaintiff could perform the full range of sedentary work before August 19, 2021, was supported by substantial evidence. Sedentary work does not require repetitive stooping, and the ALJ considered the spinal surgery, medical opinions, treatment records, and evidence concerning plaintiff's functioning.
2. The ALJ did not commit reversible error by relying directly on the Medical-Vocational Guidelines for the period before August 19, 2021.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Rather, the Commissioner's determination will only be reversed if the correct legal standards were not applied, or it was not supported by substantial evidence." (at 6)

"By its very nature, work performed primarily in a seated position entails no significant stooping." (at 10)

"There is some evidence in the record to suggest that plaintiff was limited in engaging in repetitive stooping, but as sedentary work does not require repetitive stooping, the ALJ's failure to reference plaintiff's spine deformity or temporary use of a back brace in the context of his ability to stoop or bend amounts to harmless error." (at 14)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff applied for disability insurance benefits based on impairments including lumbar-spine degenerative changes, obesity, spinal conditions, and hand and upper-extremity disorders. He underwent spinal fusion surgery in November 2020 and was advised to continue using a lumbosacral orthosis back brace for a period afterward. The ALJ found that plaintiff could perform the full range of sedentary work before August 19, 2021, but had additional exertional restrictions beginning on that date that left him unable to perform work existing in significant numbers.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for Title II disability insurance benefits, alleging disability beginning November 10, 2020. The SSA denied the claim initially and on reconsideration. After a hearing, the ALJ issued a partially favorable decision finding plaintiff not disabled before August 19, 2021, but disabled beginning on that date; the Appeals Council affirmed. Plaintiff then commenced this action, moved to reverse and remand, and the Commissioner cross-moved for affirmance.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Joseph J. B. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 1:23-CV-652 (BKS/CFH), 2024 WL 4217371, at *1 (N.D.N.Y. Aug. 29, 2024)
- Wagner v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs., 906 F.2d 856, 860 (2d Cir. 1990)
- Johnson v. Bowen, 817 F.2d 983, 985-86 (2d Cir. 1987)
- Berry v. Schweiker, 675 F.2d 464, 467 (2d Cir. 1982)
- Halloran v. Barnhart, 362 F.3d 28, 31 (2d Cir. 2004) (per curiam)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971)
- Brault v. Soc. Sec. Admin., Comm'r, 683 F.3d 443 (2d Cir. 2012) (per curiam)
- Martone v. Apfel, 70 F. Supp. 2d 145, 148, 150 (N.D.N.Y. 1999)
- Rosado v. Sullivan, 805 F. Supp. 147, 153 (S.D.N.Y. 1992)
- Barnhart v. Thomas, 540 U.S. 20, 24 (2003)
- DeChirico v. Callahan, 134 F.3d 1177, 1180 (2d Cir. 1998)
- James L. E. v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 758 F. Supp. 3d 5, 28 (N.D.N.Y. 2024)
- Davis v. Astrue, No. 09 CIV. 4006 (KBF), 2013 WL 3388951, at *15 (S.D.N.Y. July 8, 2013)
- Reyes v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., No. 21 Civ. 372 (AEK), 2022 WL 4482543, at *16 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 27, 2022)
- Zabala v. Astrue, 595 F.3d 402, 410 (2d Cir. 2010)
- Krull v. Colvin, 669 F. App'x 31, 32 (2d Cir. 2016) (summary order)
- Bonet ex rel. T.B. v. Colvin, 523 F. App'x 58, 59 (2d Cir. 2013) (summary order)