

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
NORTH CAROLINA

Crystal M. v. Frank J. Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

No. 1:24CV899, United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina (June 15, 2026)

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina reviews the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of Crystal M.’s application for Supplemental Security Income. The court analyzes the administrative law judge’s evaluation of Plaintiff’s subjective complaints of pain, including the medical evidence, treatment history, and residual functional capacity assessment. The court concludes that Plaintiff has not established entitlement to relief and enters judgment for the Commissioner.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	L. Patrick Auld
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina
DECIDED	June 15, 2026
DOCKET	1:24CV899
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Judicial review under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) of the Commissioner's final decision denying Plaintiff's application for Supplemental Security Income.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court may not try the Social Security case de novo and must uphold the ALJ's factual findings if supported by substantial evidence and reached through application of the correct legal standard. The court may not reweigh conflicting evidence, make credibility determinations, or substitute its judgment for that of the ALJ.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Crystal M. v. Frank J. Bisignano, Commissioner of Social Security

TOPICS

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

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security

administrative law

judicial review of agency action

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the ALJ applied the correct legal standard in evaluating Plaintiff's subjective complaints of pain.
2. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on objective medical findings to discount Plaintiff's subjective symptom reports.
3. Whether the ALJ improperly relied on Plaintiff's stable pain-treatment history.
4. Whether the ALJ failed to perform an adequate function-by-function residual-functional-capacity assessment, particularly concerning sitting, standing, walking, and the frequency of position changes.

HOLDINGS

1. The ALJ properly applied the two-part regulatory framework by finding that Plaintiff's medically determinable impairments could reasonably be expected to produce some symptoms and then evaluating the intensity, persistence, and limiting effects of those symptoms in light of the entire record.
2. The ALJ did not violate Arakas or Oakes by considering objective medical evidence in evaluating pain arising from a healed femur fracture and chronic pain syndrome.
3. The ALJ permissibly considered Plaintiff's generally stable pain-treatment history and relatively unchanged opioid medication in assessing the intensity, persistence, and limiting effects of her symptoms.
4. The ALJ's failure to expressly discuss sitting, standing, and walking on a separate function-by-function basis did not require remand because the decision provided an accurate and logical bridge between the evidence and the RFC finding.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"However, 'the scope of . . . review of [such a] decision . . . is extremely limited.'" (4)

"'In reviewing for substantial evidence, the [C]ourt should not undertake to re-weigh conflicting evidence, make credibility determinations, or substitute its judgment for that of the [ALJ, as adopted by the Commissioner].'" (5)

"Although a claimant's allegations about her pain may not be discredited solely because they are not substantiated by objective evidence of the pain itself or its severity, they need not be accepted to the extent they are inconsistent with the available evidence, including objective evidence of the underlying impairment, and the extent to which that impairment can reasonably be expected to cause the pain the claimant alleges she suffers." (16-17)

"remand may be appropriate where an ALJ fails to assess a claimant's capacity to perform relevant functions, despite contradictory evidence in the record, or where other inadequacies in the ALJ's analysis frustrate meaningful review" (23)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged disability based in part on chronic pain following a November 2018 motor vehicle accident that caused a left femur fracture requiring surgical repair and hardware placement. The ALJ found severe impairments including the healed femur fracture with hardware, chronic pain syndrome, and several mental-health conditions, but found that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity for a restricted range of light work. The record included generally normal strength, muscle bulk and tone, range of motion, and gait; no hardware complication; minimal or mild effusion; and generally stable pain-management treatment. The court concluded that these findings and the other evidence supported the ALJ's assessment of Plaintiff's reported pain and functional limitations.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff applied for SSI and was denied initially and on reconsideration. After an initial ALJ decision denying benefits, the Appeals Council granted review and ordered a new hearing because the ALJ had not adequately evaluated certain alleged mental impairments. Following a second hearing, the ALJ again denied benefits, and the Appeals Council denied review. On the parties' consent, the magistrate judge conducted all proceedings and affirmed the Commissioner's decision, dismissing the action with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Hines v. Barnhart, 453 F.3d 559, 561 (4th Cir. 2006)
- Frady v. Harris, 646 F.2d 143, 144 (4th Cir. 1981)
- Oppenheim v. Finch, 495 F.2d 396, 397 (4th Cir. 1974)
- Hunter v. Sullivan, 993 F.2d 31, 34-35 (4th Cir. 1992)
- Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 390 (1971)
- Mastro v. Apfel, 270 F.3d 171, 176-80 (4th Cir. 2001)
- Craig v. Chater, 76 F.3d 585, 589, 595 (4th Cir. 1996)
- Hall v. Harris, 658 F.2d 260, 264-65 (4th Cir. 1981)
- Albright v. Commissioner of Soc. Sec. Admin., 174 F.3d 473, 475 n.2 (4th Cir. 1999)
- Bennett v. Sullivan, 917 F.2d 157, 159 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Oakes v. Kijakazi, 70 F.4th 207, 215 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Arakas v. Commissioner, Soc. Sec. Admin., 983 F.3d 83, 96-98, 101-02 (4th Cir. 2020)
- Shelley C. v. Commissioner of Soc. Sec., 61 F.4th 341, 361-62 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Laquita M. R. v. Bisignano, No. 1:24CV604, 2025 WL 2689043, at *13 (M.D.N.C. Sept. 19, 2025)
- Mascio v. Colvin, 780 F.3d 632, 636-37 (4th Cir. 2015)
- Woods v. Berryhill, 888 F.3d 686, 694 (4th Cir. 2018)
- Cichocki v. Astrue, 729 F.3d 172, 177 (2d Cir. 2013)

- *Holland v. Commissioner of Soc. Sec. Admin.*, Civ. No. 17-1874, 2018 WL 1970745, at *10 (D. Md. Apr. 25, 2018)

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