

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS
FAYETTEVILLE DIVISION

AMANDA ECHOLS

PLAINTIFF

v.

CIVIL NO. 5:18-CV-5151

ANDREW M. SAUL,¹ Commissioner,
Social Security Administration

DEFENDANT

MEMORANDUM OPINION

Plaintiff, Amanda Echols, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 405(g), seeking judicial review of a decision of the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (Commissioner) denying her claims for a period of disability and disability insurance benefits (DIB) and supplemental security income (SSI) under the provisions of Titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act (Act). In this judicial review, the Court must determine whether there is substantial evidence in the administrative record to support the Commissioner's decision. See 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).

Plaintiff protectively filed her current applications for DIB and SSI on March 13, 2015, and March 6, 2015, respectively, alleging an inability to work since January 31, 2015, due to back issues and arthritis. (Tr. 59, 66, 75, 86). For DIB purposes, Plaintiff maintained insured status through June 30, 2018. (Tr. 59, 75). An administrative hearing was held on August 12,

¹ Andrew M. Saul, has been appointed to serve as Commissioner of Social Security, and is substituted as Defendant, pursuant to Rule 25(d)(1) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

2016, where Plaintiff appeared and testified. (Tr. 35-54). Barbara Hubbard, Vocational Expert (VE), also appeared via telephone and testified. (Tr. 53-55).

By written decision dated August 16, 2017, the ALJ found that during the relevant time period, Plaintiff had the following severe impairments: disorder of the right knee, disorder of the back, and obesity. (Tr. 17). However, after reviewing all of the evidence presented, the ALJ determined that Plaintiff's impairments did not meet or equal the level of severity of any impairment listed in the Listing of Impairments found in Appendix I, Subpart P, Regulation No. 4. (Tr. 19). The ALJ found that Plaintiff retained the residual functional capacity (RFC) to perform a full range of sedentary work as defined in 20 CFR §§ 404.1567(a) and 416.967(a). (Tr. 20). The ALJ, with the use of the Medical-Vocational Guidelines (Grids), found Plaintiff was not disabled. (Tr. 24).

Plaintiff then requested a review of the hearing decision by the Appeals Council, but the request was denied on May 30, 2018. (Tr. 1-6). Subsequently, Plaintiff filed this action. (Doc. 1). This case is before the undersigned pursuant to the consent of the parties. (Doc. 6). Both parties have filed appeal briefs, and the case is now ready for decision. (Docs. 13, 14).

This Court's role is to determine whether the Commissioner's findings are supported by substantial evidence on the record as a whole. Ramirez v. Barnhart, 292 F.3d 576, 583 (8th Cir. 2002). Substantial evidence is less than a preponderance, but it is enough that a reasonable mind would find it adequate to support the Commissioner's decision. The ALJ's decision must be affirmed if the record contains substantial evidence to support it. Edwards v. Barnhart, 314 F.3d 964, 966 (8th Cir. 2003). As long as there is substantial evidence in the record that supports the Commissioner's decision, the Court may not reverse it simply because substantial evidence exists in the record that would have supported a contrary outcome, or because the

Court would have decided the case differently. Haley v. Massanari, 258 F.3d 742, 747 (8th Cir. 2001). In other words, if after reviewing the record it is possible to draw two inconsistent positions from the evidence and one of those positions represents the findings of the ALJ, the decision of the ALJ must be affirmed. Young v. Apfel, 221 F.3d 1065, 1068 (8th Cir. 2000).

The Court has reviewed the entire transcript and the parties' briefs. For the reasons stated in the ALJ's well-reasoned opinion and the Government's brief, the Court finds Plaintiff's arguments on appeal to be without merit and finds that the record as a whole reflects substantial evidence to support the ALJ's decision. Accordingly, the ALJ's decision is hereby summarily affirmed and Plaintiff's Complaint is dismissed with prejudice. See Sledge v. Astrue, No. 08-0089, 2008 WL 4816675 (W.D. Mo. Oct. 31, 2008) (summarily affirming ALJ's denial of disability benefits), aff'd, 364 Fed. Appx. 307 (8th Cir. 2010).

IT IS SO ORDERED AND ADJUDGED this 4th day of February, 2020.

/s/ Erin L. Wiedemann

HON. ERIN L. WIEDEMANN
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE