CLERKS OFFICE U.S. DIST. COURT
AT ABINGDON, VA
FILED
October 22, 2026
LAURA A. AUSTIN, CLERK
BY: s/ FELICIA CLARK
DEPUTY CLERK

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
ABINGDON DIVISION

CHRISTINE D.C. HICKS,	)	
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	Case No. 1:25CV00061
	)	
v.	)	**OPINION AND ORDER**
	)	
FRANK J. BISIGNANO, Commissioner of Social Security,	)	JUDGE JAMES P. JONES
	)	
Defendant.	)	

Amy Hansen Geddes, OPN LAW, PLC, Roanoke, Virginia, for Plaintiff; Natasha T. McKay, Special Assistant United States Attorney, SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, Baltimore, Maryland, for Defendant.

In this social security disability case, I will accept the Report and Recommendation ("Report") of the magistrate judge.

I.

The plaintiff challenges the final decision of the Commissioner of Social Security ("Commissioner") denying her claim for supplemental security income benefits under the provisions of the Social Security Act ("Act"). The action was referred to United States Magistrate Judge Pamela Meade Sargent to conduct appropriate proceedings. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). Magistrate Judge Sargent filed her 34-page Report on September 22, 2026, in which she recommended that the court affirm the Commissioner's decision denying

benefits. On October 6, 2026, the plaintiff filed a timely Objection to the Report. The plaintiff then filed Amended Objections on October 7, 2026. The Commissioner has not filed a response to the Objection and accordingly the Objection is ripe for decision.

II.

I must make a de novo determination of the portions of the Report to which the plaintiff objects. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). Under the Act, I must uphold the factual findings and the final decision of the administrative law judge ("ALJ") if they are supported by substantial evidence and were reached through application of the correct legal standard. *Coffman v. Bowen*, 829 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987). "[T]he threshold for such evidentiary sufficiency is not high." *Biestek v. Berryhill*, 587 U.S. 97 (2019). Substantial evidence is "evidence which a reasoning mind would accept as sufficient to support a particular conclusion. It consists of more than a mere scintilla of evidence but may be somewhat less than a preponderance." *Laws v. Celebrezze*, 368 F.2d 640, 642 (4th Cir. 1966).

If such evidence exists, my inquiry is terminated, and the Commissioner's final decision must be affirmed. *Id.* But I may not "reflexively rubber-stamp an ALJ's findings." *Arakas v. Comm'r*, 983 F.3d 83, 95 (4th Cir. 2020) (citation omitted).

> The plaintiff objects for the following reasons:
>
> The Report and Recommendation erred in concluding substantial evidence exists in the record to support the ALJ's consideration of the opinion evidence; erred in concluding substantial evidence exists in the record to support the ALJ's analysis of plaintiff's allegations; erred in concluding substantial evidence exists in the record to support the ALJ's residual functional capacity finding; and, erred in concluding substantial evidence exists in the record to support the ALJ's finding that plaintiff was not disabled under the Act and not entitled to SSI benefits.

Obj. R. & R. 1, Dkt. 15, and Am. Obj. R. & R. 1, Dkt. 16.

The magistrate judge correctly resolved these arguments in her Report. Although the plaintiff points out that certain mental illnesses do not always produce objective evidence, as discussed in *Shelley C. v. Comm'r*, 61 F.4th 341, 361-62 (4th Cir. 2023), the Report adequately grapples with this issue in its determination that the ALJ had substantial evidence in finding that "the claimant's medically determinable impairments could reasonably be expected to cause the alleged symptoms; however, the claimant's statements concerning the intensity, persistence and limiting effects of these symptoms are not entirely consistent with the medical evidence and other evidence in the record." R. & R. 30, Dkt. 14.

Based upon my careful consideration of the plaintiff's objections, the record, and the arguments of counsel, I agree with the magistrate judge that substantial evidence supported the ALJ's findings, and that the ALJ's decision was in accord

with relevant case precedent.

III.

Accordingly, it is **ORDERED** as follows:

1. The plaintiff's objections, Dkt. No. 15, and amended objections, Dkt. No. 16, are DENIED.
2. The magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation, Dkt. No. 14, is fully ACCEPTED; and
3. A separate final judgment will be entered herewith.

ENTER: October 22, 2026

/s/ JAMES P. JONES
Senior United States District Judge