End to some pandemic-era child care subsidies could make hiring harder [1]

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Excerpts

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To recruit and keep those teachers, Downtown Baltimore Child Care has prioritized payroll. The nonprofit organization, which has three centers across Baltimore, received just over $1 million in federal pandemic relief funds. The vast majority went toward wages. The deadline to spend those funds just passed at the end of September — the so-called "child care cliff." There was over $37 billion awarded to hundreds of thousands of providers across the country. Now that the money is gone, it could affect providers' ability to recruit and retain workers.

> "It really was sort of this makeshift scaffolding that's boosting up this — I think of it as a ramshackle mansion," Elizabeth Pufall Jones with the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California-Berkeley. "Those funds are now ending … so all of that scaffolding is going to fall down."

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Roberts-King said she's fundraising and applying for grants to try to make up for the loss of federal funds. She's also keeping an eye on costs — putting off replacing the windows, for instance — and giving smaller raises than she would have liked.

> "This past year, we had to do 4% for people who make less and 2% for people who make more, because that was what it took to get us over the finish line," said Roberts-King. "And it wasn't great news."

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> "The pay in this career is not enough," said Tiffany Thornton, a teacher with Downtown Baltimore Child Care. She loves the work, but said she still has to supplement her income.

> "I've been here 20 years, and I still do side jobs. I babysit on the side, I do Instacart on the side," said Thornton.

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But others have left the industry. There's more than 38,000 fewer child care providers now than in February 2020.
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