



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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Housing & Community Development Department

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April 7, 2025

The Honorable Brandon Creighton – Committee Chair  
Senate Committee on Education K-16  
Sam Houston Building, 440  
201 E 14th St  
Austin, TX 78701

## RE: ADDRESSING SENATE BILL 2623

Honorable Chairman Creighton and Members of the Senate Committee on Education K-16,

On behalf of the City of Houston, I appreciate the opportunity to provide and share this written testimony on **Senate Bill 2623** (SB 2623), “*Relating to establishment and enforcement of school safety zones; providing a civil penalty*”, introduced by Chairman Creighton. The City of Houston, as a leader and model for the nation in addressing homelessness, would like to offer our insights and work together with the state legislature to inform future legislative actions addressing homelessness in Texas.

Since 2011, Houston and Harris County have housed over 32,000 people, and due to our strong dedication and commitment between the city, county, and its partners and a concerted effort to leverage these partnerships and available resources, including federal dollars, in providing public services, shelters, and rehousing of homeless individuals and families. The city and its partners were able to accomplish this while experiencing numerous federally declared disasters, including Hurricane Harvey, COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 Winter Storm, and more recently, the 2024 derecho and Hurricane Beryl.

Furthermore, the City has worked with schools and homeless service providers to negotiate successful collaboration. One example is the agreement between the City, the surrounding neighborhood, a large daycare/preschool, and the operator, and leasee of the Navigation Center. The Center serves about 80 people who were experiencing homelessness and are now waiting for housing. The agreement answered the concerns of the neighborhood and the school while

servicing this vulnerable population. This kind of collaboration has been successful many times in Houston and Harris County.

With that said, the City of Houston would like to propose a list of potential amendments that would work with our model/program, while tackling the issues portrayed in the bill.

### *Challenges of SB 2623*

SB 2623, in its written form, will have negative impacts on Houston. At the same time, we are cognizant of the concerns among communities about the safety and well-being of students, families, and residents.

The terminology and definition of “Homeless services” defined in the bill is broad, which would penalize any entity that touches on the homeless response system. This would impact the office locations of all our partners/providers, including SEARCH, Healthcare for the Homeless, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (CDVCC), The Women’s Home, Catholic Charities, The Beacon, etc. The bill would also impact many Harris Health clinics, hospitals, and Harris Center locations that provide mental health services to persons experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, the bill’s definition of “school” will apply to all schools, including institutes of higher education, private schools, and charter schools. Many community colleges do provide day-care services and resources to individuals who may be experiencing homelessness. The bill could potentially deprive the opportunities and resources available to those who are making efforts to leave the homeless system. Also, historically speaking, some non-profits were formulated or established their services and offices where there was an already operating day-care.

As it currently sits, the establishment of the “school safety zone”, which encompasses a 1.5-mile buffer from schools, day-care centers, playgrounds (which means just about every park in the city, Harris County, etc.), would exclude most if not all the city, given the widespread locations of each.

Currently, the City of Houston works with 32 agencies that provide services for persons experiencing homelessness. With a 1.5-mile distance requirement, none of the agencies will be able to provide services, as they have at least one “school” inside the “school safety zone”. Even reduced to 1,500 ft, about a third (11) entities would be located inside the school safety zone. We have also included a map for the committee’s reference. Attached is a map of the impacted service providers impacted at 1.5 miles.

### *Proposed Amendments to SB 2623*

At the same time, we understand the goal behind this bill and the need for community safety. Below is a list of potential committee substitutes that we believe may still work with our model/program, while tackling the issue that the bill is trying to resolve. As the bill stemmed from a “local” issue, we ask that the bill include a system/method of obtaining a waiver or exemption for certain governmental entities, allowing the co-existence of schools, parks, and homeless service providers.

#### **Exempt a municipality located inside a County with a population of more than 2,000,000 people.**

- This would exempt municipalities, including Houston, located in Harris County, Bexar County, Dallas County, and Tarrant County, while keeping Travis County (and the City of Austin) subject to the provisions of the bill.

#### **Define school safety zone as the 1,000-ft radius surrounding pre-K to 12 schools and applicable to only public schools in Texas.**

- This would target this bill to the service providers that are most closely impacting schools.
- Tailoring this bill to public schools allows there to be a clear definition of what locations are to be included in the safety zone. Attached is a map of the impacted service providers impacted at 1,000 feet.

#### **Exempt hospitals, domestic abuse shelters, etc., from the definition of a service provider.**

- One example of this would be the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC), which provides 135 units/rooms to individuals and families fleeing from domestic violence.
- The way the bill is written, HAWC would be subject to a penalty and would not be able to operate as the property itself has a pre-K to 12 public school located on the campus.

#### **Allow a service provider that has an agreement with a public/private entity to operate within the "school zone".**

- An example of this is the Housing Navigation Center, which is located next to a soccer field and near a daycare center (across the street).
- The operation of the navigation center would still be extremely challenging even with a reduction to 1,000 feet.

The City of Houston is dedicated to addressing the root causes of homelessness, balancing compassion with enforcement, and working closely with local and state partners. We acknowledge that the success of our initiatives and programs will help support a legislative framework that allows cities the flexibility to adopt solutions that meet the unique needs of their communities.

Finally, I want to extend our availability as a resource to the committee. If you are interested in learning more about our programs or would like to tour our facilities, we welcome the

opportunity to meet with you individually. Together, we can build a more resilient, compassionate Texas where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Respectfully,

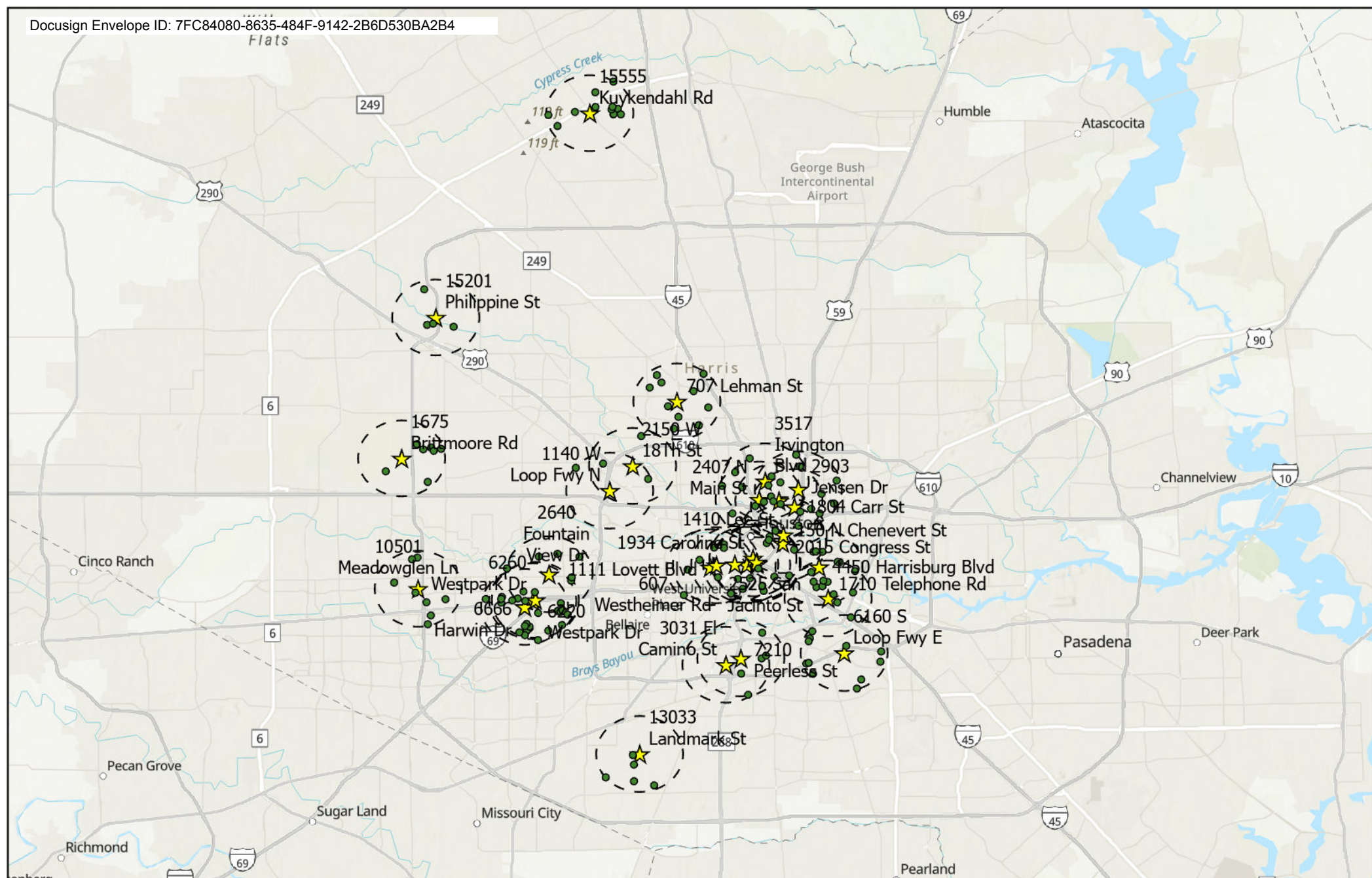
DocuSigned by:

*Michael Nichols*

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Michael C. Nichols

Director

City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department



## Legend

- Schools
- ★ COH Homeless Service Agencies
- 1.5 Mile Buffer

Data Sources: Housing & Community Development Department; and the City of Houston GIS (COHGIS) 03/2025

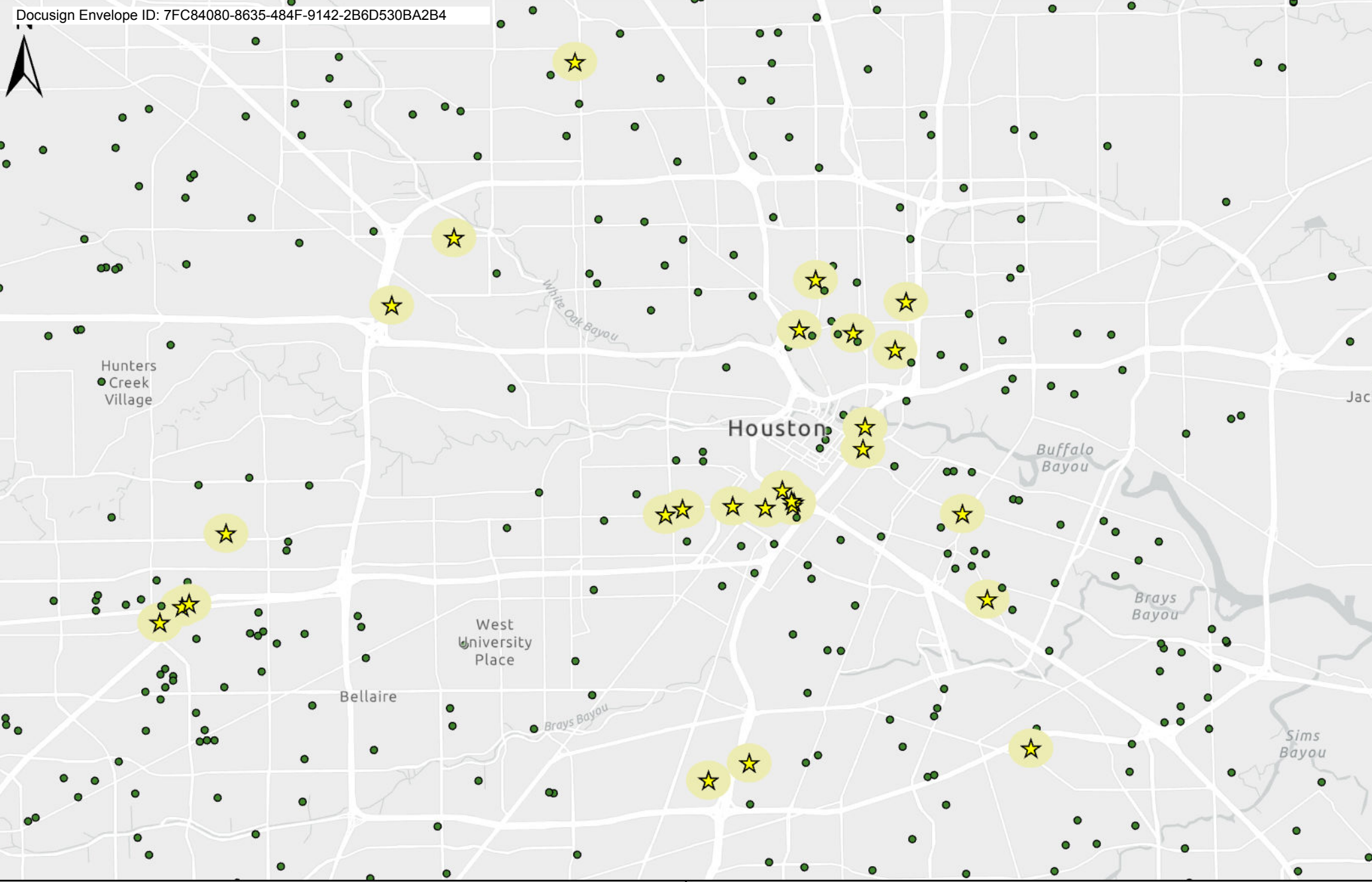
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The City of Houston neither represents, nor warrants the data accuracy, or completeness, nor will the City of Houston accept liability of any kind in conjunction with its use.



0 2.05 4.1 8.2 Miles





# Legend

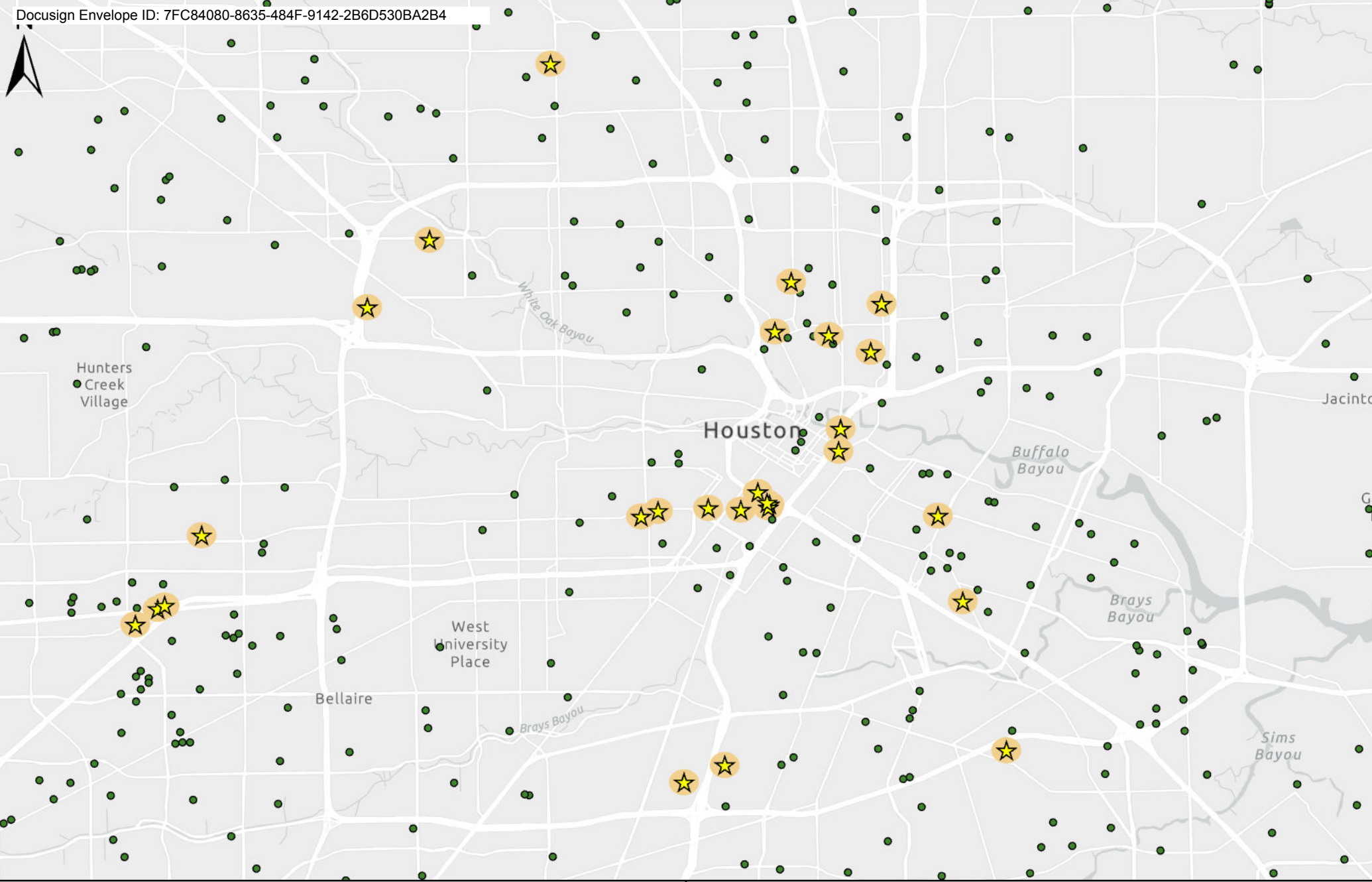
- ★ COH Homeless Service Agencies
- 1500 ft buffer
- Schools within 1500ft

Data Sources: Housing & Community Development Department; and the City of Houston GIS (COHGIS) 03/2025

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## Legend

- Schools within 1000 feet
- COH Homeless Service Agencies
- 1000 feet buffer

Data Sources: Housing & Community Development Department; and the City of Houston GIS (COHGIS) 03/2025

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0 0.78 1.55 3.1 Miles

