



June 23, 2025

The Honorable Cecil Bell  
Chair, House Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

**RE: Houston Permitting Center (HPC) Position on H.B. 4999**

Dear Chairman Bell and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Houston Permitting Center, I appreciate the opportunity to provide insight into H.B. 4999 and its potential impact to local governments bracketed to its provisions.

H.B. 4999 establishes new regulations related to the registration of vacant buildings. Among other things, the bill would reduce the time criteria for presuming a building is vacant from 150 to 90 days and would specifically require cities like Houston to adopt and enforce an ordinance requiring owners of vacant buildings register and subsequently renew the registration each year the building remains vacant.

Specifically, there is concern regarding the bill's mandate of cities to adopt an ordinance – Which is an explicit act of the elected body of a municipality that may directed by state provisions and not necessarily mandated – that would potentially impact an owners' right to own a building and keep it vacant. The strict timeline would infringe upon those property owners who choose to maintain a vacant building, even if the building is properly secured and not considered a *dangerous building* which presents no threat to public health or safety.

The City of Houston, currently, has ordinances in place that provide for the regulation of dangerous buildings, in which there are processes by which such properties and structures are investigated and required to be made secured or demolished. And, when necessary, litigated through the judicial process. Additionally, the City of Houston has a robust process for reporting a variety of issues or concerns such as traffic signal maintenance and water leaks, but more specifically, dangerous and/or nuisance properties.

The "Houston 3-1-1 Service Helpline" provides citizens with a response and user-friendly method of reporting non-emergency concerns. Each Service Request is forwarded to the appropriate department, and a deadline date is assigned for investigation and resolution. If the same individual or someone else subsequently reports the same problem, the 311 Service Management system alerts it is a duplicate request. Up-to-the-minute Service Request status(es) are available to citizens who call back to request an update on the progress of their concern(s). This increases accountability for city departments and their personnel. The system generates numerous reports by department, by division within a department, by service request type, participants, council districts, zip codes, key map locations, and other geographic areas. Regular reports identify any service requests that have not been resolved within the pre-determined timeline. This provides greater opportunity for management supervision of personnel and assessment of the impact of deployed resources.

Buildings and structures that are reported to 311 Service Helpline are investigated and are issued citations, directed to the owner on record with HCAD and FBCAD, that are then submitted to the Houston Municipal Courts for presentation as a Class C misdemeanor. The violation and any requests for relief

authorized by ordinance are presented at a public hearing to determine its status as a dangerous building and any resulting actions, such as repair or demolition, that must take place. Once a building has been declared a *dangerous building* the owner is required to submit an application to the Building Official and obtain any related permits for either the repair or demolition of the structure. Dangerous buildings that are required to be abated must meet city specifications for securing the building from unauthorized entry.

These established processes related to Houston's dangerous building ordinance are enforced by the Department of Neighborhoods (initial investigations, etc.) and Houston Public Work's Building Code Enforcement Division (follow-up inspections related to repairs/demolitions). The Department of Neighborhoods in 2025 alone has received and investigated over 300 reports related to dangerous buildings and over 4,000 reports related to nuisance properties while functioning with a limited staff of 24 inspectors total, with 6 specifically focused on dangerous buildings. Similarly, Building Code Enforcement's Investigations Department conducted over 130 commercial dangerous building related investigations and over 350 reports related to nuisance properties in 2025 with a staff of only 15 total inspector/investigators. Houston code officials work diligently every day to ensure that dangerous buildings, as well as properties, are safe and secure.

We would be more than happy to share more information about our processes and the number of reports or investigations to facilitate a broader discussion on vacant and dangerous buildings; especially if there are certain properties that are of express concern to the Committee and Rep. Dutton.

Considering the established processes Houston currently enforces, and the potential impact overall this bill may have in enforcement as well as to owners of vacant – yet secured and safe – buildings, I would humbly urge you to consider a more balanced approach in regard to this bill. Specifically, we recommend supporting S.B. 38 (or the "squatters bill") that is viewed as a respectable benchmark for alleviating some of the concerns H.B. 4999 is seemingly aimed at helping.

Please feel free to reach out at any time as I am happy to answer any questions or discuss further.

Sincerely,

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Rudy Moreno, Jr.  
Deputy Director  
Houston Permitting Center  
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