

# Homelessness Assessment in the U.S. - with focus on LA

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## INTRODUCTION

There are more than 552,820 people who experienced homelessness in the United States in 2018, and the number is growing each year. Four in 10 people who are homeless were African American (219,809 people). One-fifth of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2018 were children (20% or 111,592).

Out of 552,820 homeless people, California takes over 24% alone, surpassing the second-largest state (NY) by over 30,000 people. Within the state of California, I chose to investigate LA as it possesses the highest number of homeless people.

The scale of the issue has prompted me to study this phenomenon, to understand the possible causes, and perhaps evaluate the effectiveness of the current emergency response.

## GLOSSARY

**Continuums of Care (CoC)** are local organizations that assist with HUD coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may encompass a city, county, metropolitan area, or an entire state.

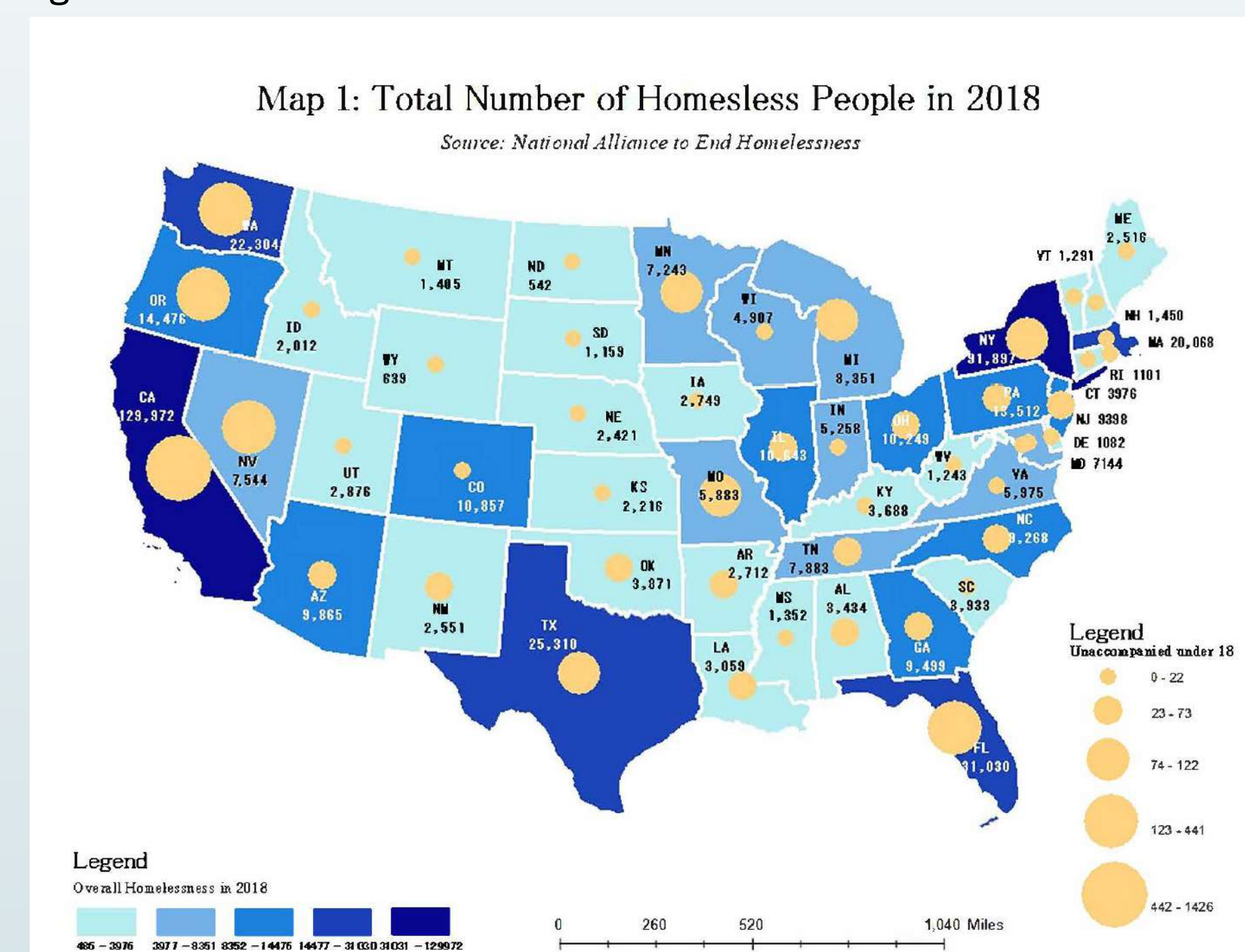
**Point-in-Time Counts** are estimates of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless population at a single night counted by Coc across the nation during the last week in January of each year.

**Emergency shelter** is a service aims to provide temporary shelter for homeless people.

## METHODOLOGY

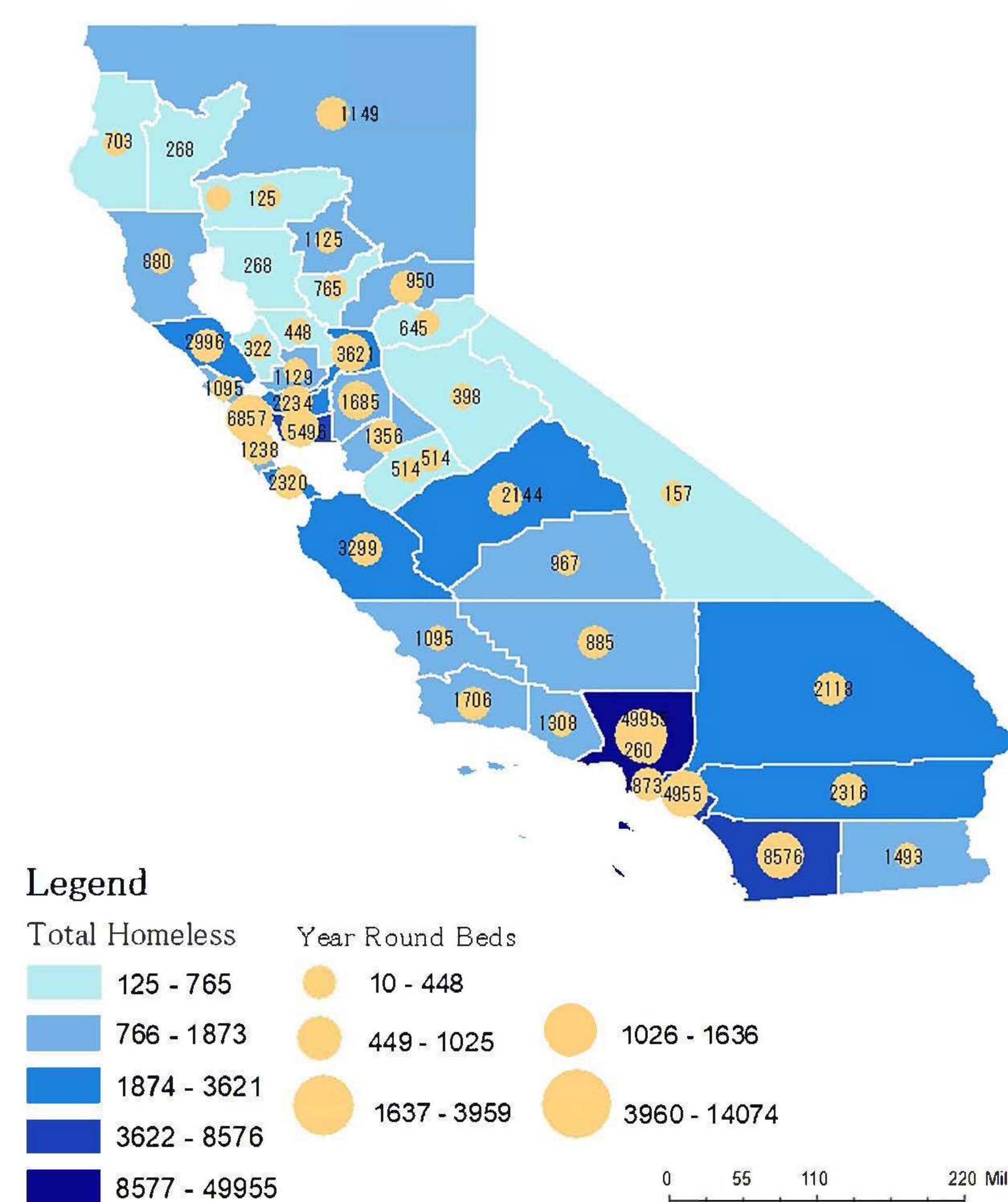
**Map 1:** Data from total number of homeless people in 2018 were presented in the gradual colors to showcase the overall distribution among different states. To contrast the ratio between the total number of homeless people and the number of unaccompanied minors, a point layer was created.

**Map 2:** Since the Continuum of Care counts the number of homeless people across counties, the shapefile for California was merged from 42 individual shapefiles. The point layer of year-round beds was created to compare the discrepancy between supply and demand for shelter programs in California.



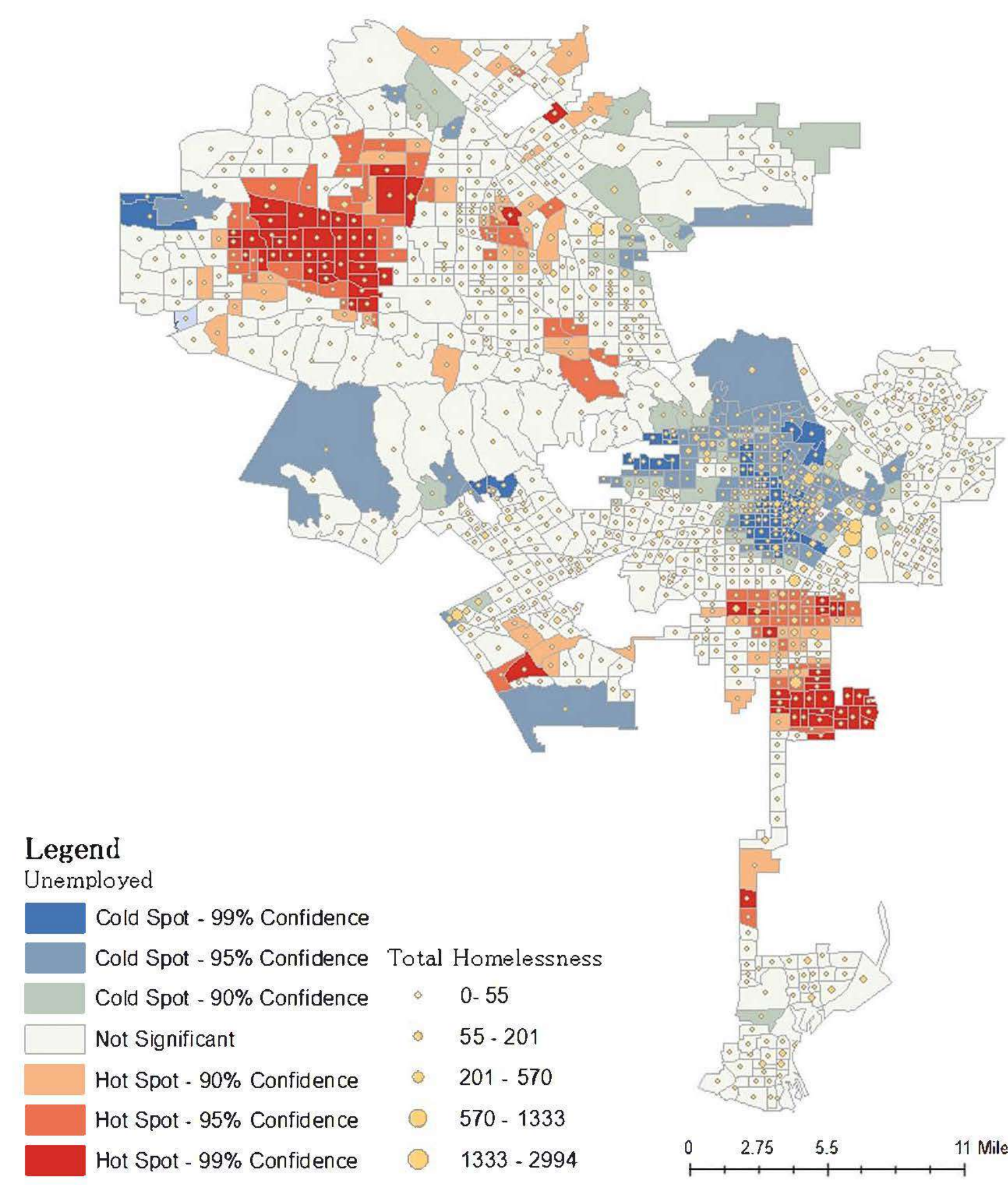
Map 2: Number of Homeless People and Year Round Beds in CA

Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness



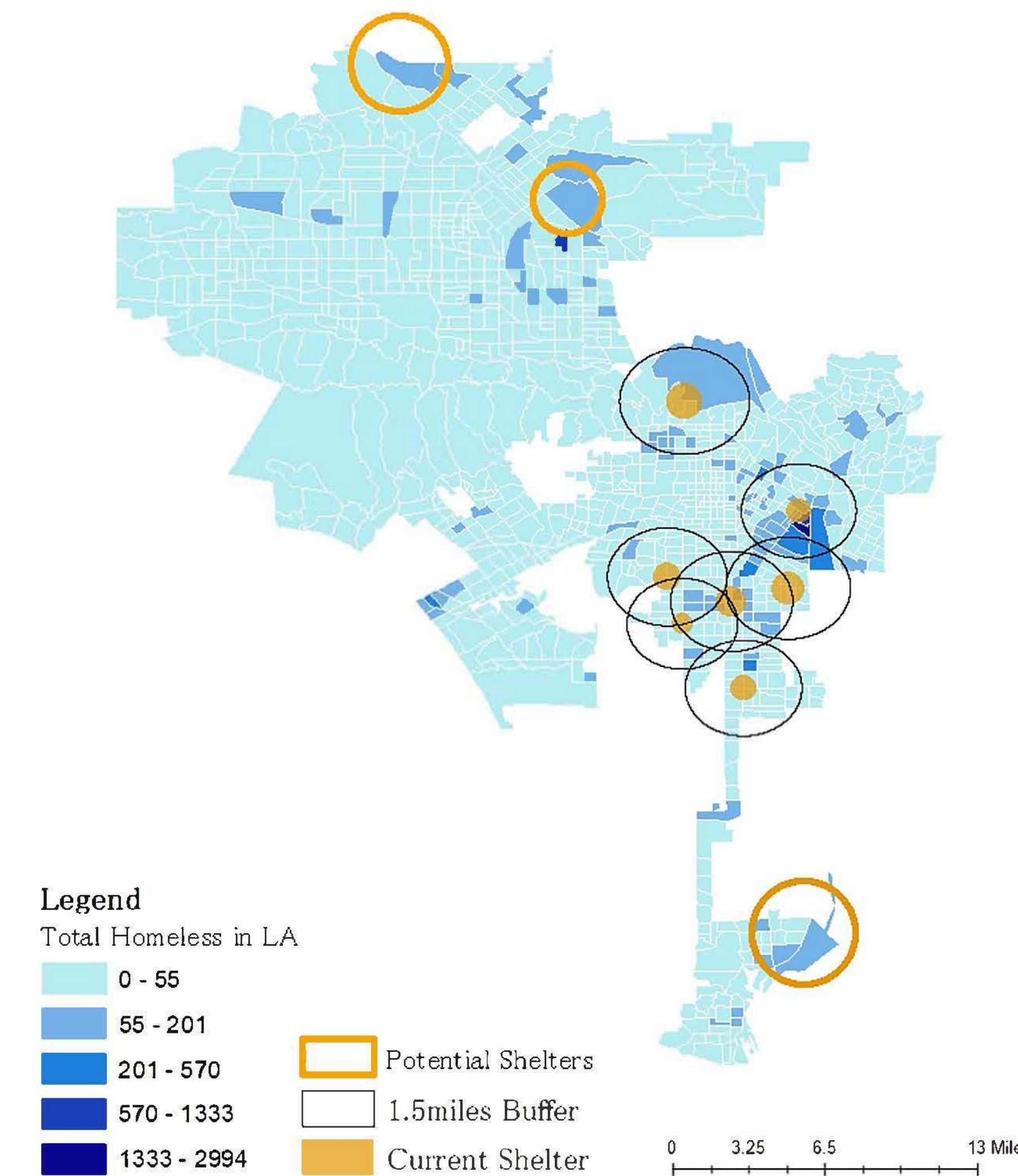
Map 3: Hot Spot Analysis of Unemployment in LA

Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness



Map 4: Shelters for Homeless People in CA

Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness



**Map 3:** City level socioeconomic data from the American Community Survey 2017 was joined to LA shape file. The point layer of the total homelessness people was created by using gradual symbols. To demonstrate the causal relationship between unemployed status and number of homeless people, Hot Spot analysis was used.

**Map 4:** Gradual colors was used to illustrate the distribution of homeless people. Data of current winter shelters from LA CoC program was geocoded in the shapefile by creating new file in the Arc Catalogue. A buffer layer was created to understand if the current shelter programs meet the need of the homeless people.

## RESULTS

**Map 1** shows California, New York, and Florida are the top three states that hosted the highest number of homeless people in 2018. The ratio between number of homeless people and unaccompanied minors are pretty much positive, however, states like Nevada, Oregon, and Minnesota have disproportioned number of unaccompanied minors comparing with their overall number of homeless people.

A closer look of California in **Map 2** illustrates that the majority of homeless people come from Los Angeles City and County (49,955/129,972), and San Diego City and County hosted second largest number of homeless people (8,576/129,972). The distribution seems clustered in the southern part of the California state. Cities that have a higher number of homeless people tend to have a higher number of year-round beds. However, the supply is significantly less than the demand. For every 5 homeless people, only 1 person can find shelter to stay in LA city and county.

Hot spot analysis of unemployment in LA city from **Map 3** tells us the clusters of number of unemployed people are centered around northwestern and southeastern parts of LA. However, the correlation between unemployment and number of homeless people is not super strong, as some of the census tracts who have high number of homeless people do not have high number of unemployed people. This could be true, as a lot of homeless people do not certainly come from that particular area, or even from that city. Other socioeconomic factors have been used for the hotspot analysis (not shown here), the correlations remain weak. It is possible the locations with higher number of homeless ness are closer to the shelters and other service programs that are being offered.

The winter shelter program offered by LA city currently has 10 locations, 3 are out of LA city area. **Map 4** shows the locations of shelters are closer to the area with a higher number of homeless people, though homeless people in the north and south part of city do not have access to shelters, which could be worrisome as winter approaches. Unreliable public transportation and economic constraints have also presented additional challenges for them to travel to current shelters. Bolded yellow boxes were created to indicate potential shelter locations.

Moreover, the number of beds offered do not match the number of homeless people. Out of 10 locations, only 4 shelters are designated for kids and women only.

## CONCLUSION

Over half a million people in the United States have experienced homelessness in 2018, the magnitude of this issue raises serious concerns over the root causes and government response. Though the total number of homeless people remains unchanged over the decade, however the stagnation of situation also presents question of the effectiveness of current emergency response and policies, with LA as the perfect example. The growing number of unaccompanied homeless minors should also alarm the government in terms of preventing the emergence of chronic patterns among homeless people.

- **Minimizing root causes.** The prevention of growing number of homeless people requires the government to address some of the core issues, e.g. rising cost of housing in both CA and NY area, unemployment rate. Policies like affordable housing, skill training should be implemented.
- **Improving shelter program.** Both **Map 2** and **Map 4** show the asymmetric demand and supply for shelters, cities have a significant number of homeless people need to invest further in terms of building shelter centers around the most clustered areas and food aid, particularly in the cold season.
- **Enriching data pool.** Currently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is the leading institute combating the homelessness, the data and reports around homeless are thus, very limited. Data about socioeconomic characteristics of the homeless people would be helpful in term of uncovering more information about their background and offering more effective help and programs.

## LIMITATIONS

The limitations to this analysis include but are not limited to the availability of certain data, e.g. socioeconomic characteristics of homeless people; the accuracy of number of homeless people since the HUD only conducts biannual counting and the nature of head counting. The comparative study between NY and CA could help understand if both states share similar challenges or not.

## REFERENCES

- Homelessness Data: National Alliance to End Homelessness  
 Other Data : American Community Survey 2017, U.S. Census Bureau  
 Background information: "The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness," n.d., 100; "114,000 Students in N.Y.C. Are Homeless. These Two Let Us Into Their Lives. - The New York Times," accessed December 10, 2019; "Emergency Shelter Grants Program Reports and Program Data - HUD Exchange," accessed December 10, 2019.  
*All figures are projected as North America (2011) Albers.*