

November 23, 2021 Testimony Before NY Independent Redistricting Committee
Stony Brook University, Wang Center
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My name is Virginia Capon and I'm a life-long resident of Port Jefferson here in the Town of Brookhaven. I'm also a practicing attorney. My comments today relate to the map for Assembly District 4, which is represented by Assemblyman Steve Englebright. I have one request: please re-unite the community of Gordon Heights/Coram and Setauket into AD4.

The Setauket portion of the Fourth Assembly District has historic continuity with the Gordon Heights/Coram area, through bloodlines, worship, and friendship. There is a strong link between them and they are, in every sense, one community. Both areas contain two strong enclaves of long-time residents of African descent. The famous local painter William Sidney Mount was depicting these families in the 1850's and those families are still here today. In Setauket, the area is known as the Bethel-Christian Avenue-Laurel Hill Historic District and is on the National Register. In the 1940s and 50s, the Gordon Heights community attended school in Port Jefferson just down the road not far from here.

This historic connection actually began with President George Washington. He came to Setauket to meet at the Roe Tavern in 1782. It was there that he thanked the members of the Culper Spy Ring for saving our democracy. And how did he get there? He travelled first to the Coram/Gordon Heights. And why did he go to there? There had been an incredible foray by the Patriots in 1780. Caleb Brewster of Setauket was one of them. The Patriots burned all the hay, a couple of stories high, that the British had stockpiled. That hay was the equivalent today of jet fuel. By taking away the fuel that the British army needed, the British were frozen in place and the rest is history. This happened in Gordon Heights on this very day, November 23rd, in 1780.

Another historical connection between Setauket and the Gordon Heights/Coram area relates to the Town of Brookhaven itself. The Town was founded in Setauket in 1655 and was governed from there until about 1790, when the seat of Town government was relocated to the Davis House in Gordon Heights/Coram. The two areas of the Town are separated by only a few miles but we share a single sense of place to this day.

Despite the continuity of these areas, only two of the three election districts in the Gordon Heights/Coram area are in the 4th Assembly District. Please ensure that all of the Gordon Heights election districts, numbers 137, 200, and 192 are in the right place, that being Assembly District 4. This will guarantee that we as a community can raise our voices as one.

Thank you.