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For Immediate Release

## **Natasha Ray Joins First Candle Board of Directors**

May 30, 2019 – New Canaan, CT – Natasha Ray, M.S., has been appointed to the Board of Directors of New Canaan-based First Candle, it was announced by CEO Alison Jacobson and Board Chair David Cunningham.

Ray is the Core Services Manager for the New Haven Healthy Start Program at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. She has been with New Haven Healthy Start since 1998. She is responsible for overseeing how families are navigated through medical and social service systems, as well as internal health care systems. This includes identifying obstacles to accessing care and implementing evidence-based practices model across platforms.

Ray works closely with Yale University's Schools of Medicine and Public Health as a community researcher, co-investigator and is the Chair of the Center for Research Engagement Steering Committee at Yale. She has authored a guidebook of best practices in community-partnered research that is now part of the Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) international resource library.

"I see First Candle as a national maternal and child health program that has created innovative ways to educate and raise awareness on approaches to preventing infant mortality, and to address some of the policy issues that affect our families," Ray said. "The organization is a natural connection for me. The World Health Organization tells us that in 2017 2.5 million children died within the first month of life. More than half of these early child deaths are due to conditions that could be prevented or treated with access to simple, affordable interventions."

"We need to move from 'business as usual' to innovative, multiple and tailored approaches to increase access, coverage and quality of maternal and child health services. And that is going to require strategic engagement of communities and providers."

Ray is a graduate of Springfield College and holds a Bachelor's degree in Human Services, and a Masters degree in Organizational Management. She earned first place in the Juried Poster Session for a community-based health behavior change program between New Haven Healthy Start and the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program, at the 2010 Improving Health through Community-Engaged Research Conference, and received the 2014 Yale University Elm-Ivy Award, among other honors. She is a Mayoral appointed member of the New Haven Early Childhood Council, and secretary of The Diaper Bank of CT, in New Haven. She is a member of Pi Gamma Mu, the International Honor Society in Social Sciences.

“Natasha is a valuable addition to our Board of Directors as we further develop ties within communities to deliver our Straight Talk for Infant Safe Sleep program to health care providers, social service agencies and childcare providers,” notes Ms. Jacobson. “In order to decrease the racial disparities that exist for SIDS and accidental suffocation and strangulation deaths and save babies’ lives, we need to recognize the social determinants and cultural barriers that exist that prevent families from adopting the safe sleep recommendations. I welcome Natasha’s experience in this area to help guide First Candle in getting all babies to their first birthday.”

**About First Candle:** [First Candle](#), based in New Canaan, Connecticut, is a national 501c(3) committed to eliminating, through education and research, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other sleep-related infant deaths including accidental suffocation. It also provides bereavement support for families who have lost a child due to SIDS, sleep-related infant deaths, stillbirth and miscarriage. SIDS remains the leading cause of death for babies one month to one year of age.

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